

**A
SCOTSMAN
IN
CANADA**



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by

JAMES H. WALKER



LONDON . JONATHAN CAPE . TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED 1935

JONATHAN CAPE LTD. 30 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON
AND 91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

104

169928

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN IN THE CITY OF OXFORD
AT THE ALDEN PRESS
PAPER MADE BY JOHN DICKINSON & CO., LTD.
BOUND BY A. W. BAIN & CO. LTD.

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CHAPTER I

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CHAPTER

§ 1

THE road plunged into the dimness of a pine wood . . . When I opened the throttle, the answering roar from the twin copper exhaust pipes of my motor cycle seemed to fill the world with sound. It was a sunny day, late in the June of 1923. In another week I would be twenty years of age.

Speed, and the beat of the powerful engine, had an exhilarating effect on me; like wine they went to my head, so that, as the pine trees blurred past, I sang Papagena's 'Maiden Fair and Tender' from the *Magic Flute* at the top of my voice.

Swooping round a corner at a dangerous angle, I passed a row of white-washed cottages, then, negotiating a hairpin bend, emerged into the sunlight again. Before me, a thin strip of blue sea ran in along the base of Brown Carrick Hill to meet the grey smoky town of Ayr; beyond, loomed the blue beckoning mountains of Galloway. Over the hawthorn hedge on either side of the road stretched green fields; growing grain, cow and sheep-dotted pasture, with here and there white-walled farmhouses half hidden by trees. Towering into the bluest of blue skies, dazzlingly white cumulus clouds filled up the background of an Ayrshire land and seascape caught at its loveliest.

Two men walking in the middle of the road caused me to swerve in rounding the next bend. When one of the men turned and shouted I stopped and was looking over my machine, a 7-9 h.p. Indian, to see if anything had dropped off, when he came panting up.

'Excuse me, mister,' he began in a shamefaced way, 'but my mate an' me are trampin' tae Ardrossan. We thoct we micht hae a chance o' gettin' a job in the shipyard there, an' I wondered if ye wid care tae help us on oor wey?'

'You have a long walk in front of you,' I smiled.

'Aye, we hae that sir,' he replied a little huskily, looking down at his dusty boots. A dark shadow seemed to fall across the sky, as, impulsively, I put my hand in my pocket. A man old enough to be my father, tramping about the country in a vain search for work like a million and a half of his comrades!

It was an insecure world I lived in.

'Here,' I said, giving him a half-crown. 'I might find myself in the same position some day.'

Shame and delight mingled on the down-and-out's features as his hand closed on the coin. 'Naw, naw, sir,' he cried as he touched his cap, 'there's nae fear o' a young gentleman like yersel' ever comin' doon tae the likes o' this.'

'One never knows,' I yelled above the roar of the exhaust as I slipped the clutch and moved on towards the coast of Carrick.

§ 11

A month later I was busy overhauling the magneto of my motor cycle when a footstep crunched on the gravel. Looking up, I saw Ralph Roscoe coming up the garden path towards me. Ralph was a life-long acquaintance, a little older than myself, of middle-height, slimmish, brown haired, dark eyed, with clean-cut features and an inscrutable nature. His Philistinism, and the cool rational outlook on life that he affected, sometimes involved us in vehement intolerant arguments.

Ralph was unemployed.

We fell talking about the gloomy future before our War-debt burdened generation. The faces of old schoolmates were fast disappearing from the streets. At the rate Scotland was emigrating it looked as if the country would be depopulated within a decade. People were continually quoting letters, telling of the wealth and vastness of America and what fools everybody was to stay in the Old Country, where unemployment figures were mounting to staggering totals. Europe was sick; full of disillusioned neurotic ex-soldiers; no place for men

who wanted to get on in the world as we did! The old generation had led us into this mess and could damn well put it right themselves! we argued with the gravity of young men of twenty.

'I'm thinking of emigrating to the States,' declared Ralph at last. 'The Old Country's done,' he added, quoting a current phrase, 'there's no use staying on here, things'll never get any better.'

As in a dream I heard myself say, 'I'll go with you'.

I had my job in my father's office, my friends, my books and music, my motor cycle, golf, tennis, hockey, everything which should have made me happy. But for a long time there had been a vague discontent lurking at the back of my mind, during moments of disquieting self-communion I told myself that I depended too much on the efforts of other people, that it was time I looked reality in the face and learned exactly where I stood in the scheme of things.

'D'you mean it?' asked Ralph slowly and quietly.

Nodding in the affirmative I altered the whole course of my life.

We began to talk animatedly. With two of us there was a better chance of getting a start, because, if one got a job he could help the other until he was settled in something as well!

It sounded so simple as we discussed it.

We grew enthusiastic. I talked of my music, which was the great obsession of my life, and how, at a pinch, I could teach the piano or play in a cinema. We would work at anything, sweeping streets if necessary, no one would know us out there!

'When will we go, if you're really in earnest?' asked Ralph. 'It's a big step to take, you know,' he added. 'Are you sure you want to take it?'

'We'll sail on the next boat,' I cried, feeling that I couldn't get quick enough to this fabulous America that everyone raved about.

'Well, if we went straight to the States we'd have to get a quota number,' said Ralph. 'That means waiting six months anyway before we can sail. It's this Ellis Island business that's the snag. But I was reading about a harvesting scheme to

Canada in the papers the other day. The C.P.R. are advertising for fifty thousand men. They guarantee farm work at four dollars a day and say that they'll take you to Winnipeg for twelve pounds.'

Before I realized what had happened it was all settled. I had gone into the house and declared my intention of emigrating, and, receiving the hesitating reply from my mother that 'perhaps it was best', and that Canada 'might make a man of me', had returned to Ralph and told him it was all fixed up.

§ III

It was August 3rd, three weeks later. I stood on the S.S. *Marburn's* upper deck looking down on the mass of upturned faces on the dockside below. The ship's rail was crowded with emigrants shouting farewells to their friends on shore — laughing, weeping, and cheering.

'There's still time to jump ashore,' a panicky voice kept repeating within me as I watched the gap between the ship's side and the quay slowly broaden.

A great cheer went up from the ship, returned by the crowd on shore again and again. I had no heart to shout with the others; the cheering sounded in my ears like outcries of pain and sorrow. 'Jump ashore, you fool, there's still time,' the panicky voice went on. I could see my parents, my elder brother, and a younger sister, growing smaller now, becoming lost in the cheering crowd. All around were the docks which had helped to make Glasgow the 'second city of the Empire', a forest of ships' funnels, masts, and tall derricks unloading cargoes. A little while before the *Cassandra* had crept out into the river from the other side of our dock with crowded decks, bound for Quebec like ourselves.

How painful had the last hour been, standing with my people in that shed on the quay, trying to look as if I was just going off on a long week-end, conscious all the time of the possibility that I might never see them again, and around us,

people sobbing on one another's shoulders before parting. Though my heart seemed breaking I had tried to be casual about it all.

The three tugs edged us out into the muddy river Clyde; the crowd on shore ran along to the end of the dock; their cheering sounded fainter now.

I groaned inwardly as I stared astern.

Under the bright August sun, Glasgow, sprawling smokily on either side of the river, suddenly, for all its ugliness, became very dear to me. With a sudden clarity of vision, I saw that this city, my native Ayrshire, and what I had seen of the rest of Scotland during summer holidays, was all that I knew of the world. I trembled when I let my mind dwell on the unknown into which I had launched myself.

The tugs towed us slowly downstream, sirens blew farewell blasts, workmen in greasy dungarees cheered and waved the tools in their hands from the decks of liners in the last stages of completion or undergoing repair. Once a stentorian voice cut through the cheering as we passed one of these vessels bawling 'Awa' ye bloody fools.' Past the clamorous shipyards we crawled with people cheering and waving farewell from ships, docksides, ferries, and house windows.

As I clutched the ship's rail and looked silently on, my mind went racing back over the three weeks which had elapsed since Ralph and I had decided to emigrate. They had been crammed full of the excitement of booking passages, securing passports, long confabs about Canada with all sorts of people, getting things together, selling off my motor-cycle and golf-clubs, running here, there and everywhere, bidding relations and old friends good-bye. Save the farewells it had been great fun. 'My boys, you'll never regret it,' the booking-agent in Glasgow had bellowed heartily. 'If I was a young man with my life to live over again, I would sail with you myself. Canada! the young man's country! It'll make men of you all . . . Plenty of hard work and fresh air . . . and hard work never killed any man.' Backed up by his flaming posters of golden wheatfields he made it sound thrilling. But, as I saw the shipyards slipping slowly astern, I recollected that

he had never been to Canada himself, while I was on the way to test the truth of all this 'Go West, Young Man' propaganda.

The ringing of a handbell in a distant part of the ship caused a sudden stampede in the direction of the third class dining saloon. Glad of the diversion, as each familiar landmark dropping astern sent a sharp pain stabbing at my heart, I joined the mad rush, and triumphantly securing a seat at one of the long narrow tables, began to take stock of my fellow passengers for the first time.

When Ralph and I had told our acquaintances we had decided to emigrate, two others had thrown in their lot with ours. Owen Sinclair, an unemployed clerk who had been a lieutenant in an infantry regiment during the War, and Will Anderson, a Kilmarnock man, an engineer who had seen service in Palestine as a mechanic in the Royal Air Force. Will was about thirty years of age, six years older than Owen. Soon after we were towed out of the dock, all three had gone down to our cabin, so I found myself surrounded by strangers during that first meal.

At home I had always been finicky and hard to please where food was concerned. But I was determined to be a Stoic in future, so, when I found the fish rather coarse as was everything else, calling my new philosophy to my aid, I endeavoured to convince myself that I was enjoying the meal.

A confusion of voices dinned in my ears. Most of my neighbours retained their headgear, and, eyeing one another suspiciously, talked in loud aggressive tones. Some whined and cursed about the food placed before them. A powerfully built youth, wearing grey tweed plus-fours such as I wore myself, and an Edinburgh 'Varsity necktie, smiled sympathetically when our eyes met across the table. Though no words were uttered, a friendly current seemed to pass between us; I was in too great a hurry to get back to the upper deck and see as much as possible of Scotland before darkness came down to stop and speak.

§ 1 v

While a tender from Greenock lay alongside, and mail-bags and last minute passengers came on board, the panicky voice within me kept clamouring that this was the last chance to escape. But soon it was too late, the deck under my feet began to vibrate; the ship woke to life, a breeze sprang up, and the hiss of water rose from under the bow as we forged into the Firth of Clyde under our own steam.

There were many white-sailed yachts bowling along off the holiday resorts under the wine-coloured moorland hills; paddle-boats and turbine pleasure steamers dotted the Firth, sailing up towards Loch Long or down towards the Kyles of Bute.

My three companions joined me up in the bow as we passed the Cumbraes, where the Firth widens out into a sea. We were all very quiet, save Owen, who now and then tried to be facetious, but even he relapsed into silence. It was getting late by this time; the sun was setting towards the Arran peaks. Goatfell looked majestic; remote and sad, I thought. The solitary black peaks seemed to know so many things, they were so old, the Celtic gods and heroes had hunted, feasted, and made love in their shadows; the Vikings had anchored in that bay, and Bruce had sailed from there over to Turnberry, where the sun still lit up the green swelling Ayrshire hills! I had spent so many holidays in Arran! I tried to fix my thoughts on Canada and drive out the past, but every village and hill held memories, and the panicky voice kept saying: 'You'll never see all this again! Canada will kill you . . . You will die in a strange land.' To die in a strange land seemed a dreadful thought. My own country looked so beautiful in that light. I strove to keep back the tears that welled up into my eyes.

My companions had long preceded me to the cabin, Ailsa Craig was astern, and the Ayrshire coast had slowly vanished into the grey twilight ere I went below.

When I awoke next morning I wondered where I was. The tiny cabin with its four bunks brought everything back. I was an emigrant! On reviewing my position in the cold light of early morning I cursed myself for my folly. However, realizing that I had to see the thing out to the bitter end, I dressed myself, waking up my sleeping companions in the process.

'Where the hell are we?' said Ralph, sitting up in his bunk, 'The ship's stopped.'

'We're in Belfast Lough I expect,' replied Owen, peering over the edge of the bunk above him.

'Aye, that's right,' chimed in Will. 'We've got a crowd o' Irishmen to pick up, I heard some o' them say last night.'

We went up on deck. The *Marburn* lay at anchor in Belfast Lough, which was like a mirror; another liner lay a little way off, 'The *Doric*', someone said; a new two-funnelled boat with graceful lines. 'It's gaun tae be a race between us an' the *Doric* for Quebec,' the fellow added. 'The *Cassandra's* got a whole day's start on us, but it's got nae chance o' gettin' there first.' He seemed to think that it was of vital importance that the *Marburn* was first to reach Quebec. 'There'll be nae jobs left for us at Winnipeg if that lot ower there get there afore us,' he declared.

It was well into the afternoon before the anchor chain rattled harshly up through the hawse-pipe into the chain locker, and we left the *Doric* still at anchor. I resumed my station in the bow, accompanied by my friends. A helping of heavy suet pudding eaten at lunch time, reminded me that I was an indifferent sailor; but the sun shone on a calm blue sea and on an emerald Ireland, so I was able to drive a slight

squeamishness away in watching the coast change from a green fertility to the rugged mountains of the north-west.

After tea I returned to the deck, to see, bathed in a warm diffused glow, Islay and Jura, with Mull far off; the Summer Isles of the Norsemen, like islands in a fairy-tale, all harshness and barrenness softened by distance. The final scene of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* rose to mind as I looked at the last of Europe under that wonderful sunset sky. 'The Twilight of the Gods,' I muttered. Trembling on the verge of a new life, I had a strange premonition that Fate held many surprises in store for me, that, in some way, perhaps not in a material sense, my life was going to be far richer than I had ever dreamed of. 'I'm free now . . . my own master . . . I can do just whatever I like with my life!' I soliloquized.

Canada might make a man of me! So many people had used that phrase. What did they mean by being a man? I asked myself the question glancing at a saloon-bar a little way along the deck, where savage-looking men sat drinking and playing cards; loud-voiced men, wrangling, laughing raucously, or cursing, to the accompaniment of a fox-trot jangled out of a tinny piano by the sledge-hammer touch of a public-house virtuoso. If these were 'men', then I had no desire to be anything but myself!

At length I shivered with cold. When I looked down, there were strange phosphorescent gleams in the broken water speeding astern. The sea was bluey-black in the growing darkness when I went below, carrying with me a vision of that marvellous sunset with its unreal looking islands and its saffron clouds reflected in a glassy sea.

§ V I I

Paderewski was playing a weird composition in a demonic way on a long ebony concert-grand piano, and I was seated on the bench beside him. The music had a strange visceral effect; it seemed to be alternately lifting me to the skies and then plunging me into the depths. The unseen audience were

applauding and crying loudly when I opened my eyes, to discover that the *Marburn* had run into a storm. The loud outcries were the groans of sea-sick men in adjacent cabins, and the applause the swish of the sea against the thin steel plates a few inches from my head, and the shuddering of the ship as the screw raced wildly every time her nose dipped into the trough of a wave.

Happily I had told our steward I was a bad sailor, because, no sooner was I awake, than my stomach, revolting against the suet pudding of the day before, forced me to utilize the receptacle provided by the steward for such emergencies. The next three days were one long nightmare. Ralph and Owen lay *hors de combat* also, one after the other succumbing.

Will gloried in coming down after a hearty meal to torment us by describing the menu with gusto as he filled his pipe. Swinging his legs over the edge of the bunk above me, he would light up, then puffing vigorously, gloat over the agony depicted on our faces as the tiny cabin filled with clouds of nauseating smoke. The torrent of insult and abuse we hurled at him only added to his good humour.

'Ach, it's fine, I tell ye,' he would laugh. 'Ye get the whole dinin' room tae yersel'; as much grub as ye can stuff intae yersel'; and there's tons o' room tae walk about the decks afterwards. It's only imagination that's wrong wi' the three o' ye.'

Another lively soul who came in daily to relieve the tedium of those sea-sick days was Charlie, our steward. Charlie was a thin, undersized fellow, who used to cock a white, tired face with dark-ringed eyes and scrubby moustache in at the door every morning and sing out merrily, 'Hullo fellows, how are we to-day? Cheer up, we're only two miles from land now,' which joke inevitably elicited from Owen in a croaking voice some such reply as, 'Say, can't you spill us a better one than that? The first time I heard that yarn I burst the sides of my crib laughing.' Owen fancied himself the witty Bernard Shaw of the party; I was 'our tame Paderewski', as he called me one day, introducing me to a stranger. But, though he made me a butt for his jests, I had a warmer place in my affections

for the genial Owen than for the Machiavellian Ralph. Will had no pretensions, he was a practical, hard-boiled Scottish artisan, and, as such, I had no intimacy with him.

Our little steward loved to loiter in the cabin. He had an inexhaustible fund of bawdy stories, with a vivacious Gallic manner of recounting them.

The most amusing incident of those three days was a piper playing one morning at the end of our alleyway where there was a wide covered-in hatchway. The screeching and din caused by bagpipes echoing between steel-walled decks was indescribable. A chorus of shrieks, curses, and groans rose from all sides. 'By Goad, if I get ma hauns on him' . . . 'Kill him' . . . 'Throw the b——r overboard', voices yelled. Doors slammed, feet pattered down corridors, and, amid a storm of angry voices, the pipes gurgled and wailed into silence.

A sound of cheering on the main deck reached our ears when we were in mid-ocean. Word came down that we were passing the *Cassandra*, which had on board thirty young men from my native town. 'Aye, but we've nae chance against the *Doric*, said Will when describing the passing of the *Cassandra*. 'She's new, and can dae twenty knots, they tell me.'

Will always brought the latest rumours. One day he told us about two men, who having been suspected of pilfering from cabins, were caught in the trap set for them. 'The captain's pit them in irons tae protect them,' said Will. 'They tell me they were guan tae throw them ower the side. There's some wild devils on this boat I can tell ye . . . Some o' them hae been gamblin' an' drinkin' since we left the Clyde.'

§ V I I I

The captain, escorted by a gold-braided retinue, came on a tour of inspection on the third day of our sea-sickness.

'How long have these men been lying here?' he demanded gruffly of Charlie. 'Get up out of your bunks or I'll have you put in irons,' he bluffed, trying to scare us. 'Get those men on their feet again,' he snapped to the shrinking steward as he passed out.

'Would you like a cure for sea-sickness?' Charlie asked me anxiously afterwards. 'It's a pretty rough one, but I'll bring you something to drink if you'll take it.'

When I nodded, Charlie went off, returning in a short time with a tumbler filled with a thick whitish liquid. Owen and Ralph, making facetious remarks, watched me drink. 'Peugh! I'm poisoned!' I shrieked, after quaffing the contents of the glass in one gulp. It seemed to burn up my inside. 'Haw! haw!' guffawed the onlookers delightedly.

'There, sonny, you'll be right as rain to-morrow,' said Charlie.

Whether it was the sea-water I had swallowed, to which a tablespoonful of salt had been added, or whether it was mere auto-suggestion, I could not say, but that night I managed to crawl up to the dining-room and nibble one of the cast-iron ship's biscuits and a little of the cheese which was served to the steerage passengers at supper time, and next day I was bold enough to appear at breakfast, to eat a roll and drink a cup of tea.

§ 1 x

Rumours were flying round the ship that we were nearing land. I went up on deck for the first time since leaving Ireland, passing wan-looking men, who grinned sympathetically and said, 'Are ye juist getting aboot tae?' or something to that effect.

The wind was icily cold, raw and damp; the ship barely moved; a thick mist swirled over the leaden grey sea, rendering visibility practically nil. At regular intervals the fog-horn bellowed forlornly, answered by a faint wail, which the men gathered on the fo'c'sle top told me was the fog-horn at the Belle Isle lighthouse.

'The captain's afraid tae go intae the Straits because there's icebergs aheid,' exclaimed my informant.

'We'll hae tae wait till the morn's mornin' noo,' said another bitterly, 'and the *Doric* will get aheid o' us.'

'The *Doric's* aheid o' us noo', broke in a third.

'Naw it's no', retorted the first.

I left them to a heated argument and sought the warmth of the cabin.

When I returned to the fo'c'sle top next morning, all eagerness to catch a first glimpse of Canada, the fog was still there; but, as I looked, a black mass showed through a rent to the north. There was a white lighthouse down near the water's edge. It was Belle Island; a most desolate looking place.

The ship began to move forward again. It was so cold that I ran below to don a fleece-lined leather jerkin I had purchased for Manitoban winters. 'Who the hell wants to look at icebergs,' sneered Ralph, when I burst into the cabin glowing with excitement. I paid no attention to him as I buttoned up my jerkin; throwing cold water on my enthusiasm was becoming a favourite pastime of Ralph's.

It was impossible to gaze on the greenish-white icebergs at the mouth of the Belle Isle Straits, with their strange shapes, some like sleeping animals and churches, without thinking of the *Titanic* disaster, and the sagas of early voyaging, and expeditions to the Pole, which I had read.

At length the land on either side became visible. Labrador was a forbidding, rocky, treeless land, reminding me of the coast of Ardnamurchan in the West Highlands. It was difficult to imagine what winter would be like there, so gloomy and cold was August. My mind went racing over the books I had read so avidly as a boy. R. M. Ballantyne's *Ungava* and *Wild Man of the West*, Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* and *Deerslayer*, Marryat's *Settlers in Canada*; it was a long list, including Rex Beach, Jack London, Ridgewell Cullum, Ralph Connor, Zane Grey; they came tumbling into my mind as haphazardly as I had read them; between them all they enabled me to people the barren lands of Labrador and Newfoundland with a host of imaginary characters; wandering tribes of Indians, adventurous fishermen, prospectors, trappers, and fur-traders.

A cruiser lay half-beached at one point, the grey waves sweeping rhythmically over the after deck. It was the *Raleigh* which had run aground in a fog during the War, I was told.

Satiated with gloomy depressing cliffs and weary grey mists, I went below, to lunch on two apples, bought at the little shop I had discovered on one of the lower decks.

'Hello, how are you, old chap?' said a voice at my elbow. I looked round, to see the Edinburgh student again.

'I've been *hors de combat*,' I laughed, pleased to see him. 'How did you weather the storm?'

'Oh, I was all right,' he smiled. 'Never missed a meal . . I enjoyed it.'

We moved off together, and, as we were at a loose end, he proposed a game of chess. 'I've got a set with me,' he said. We passed an hour or two poring over a chess board on the top of a hatchway. I was glad of his company; Owen and Ralph were like brothers, they withheld their confidences and were always criticizing me.

The Edinburgh student and I spent the rest of the day together, watching the Strait widen out into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and the mists give way to clear blue skies and smiling blue seas, with the mountains of Newfoundland turning grape blue, and the rocks of Labrador reddish-pink. If they saw it as I did that evening, after Newfoundland fogs, cold grey seas, and black barren cliffs, it is little wonder that the Norsemen called the land to the south of the Belle Isle Straits 'Vineland the Good'.

§ x

Save for the throb of the screw, the ship was perfectly steady, as, very early next morning, I lay thinking drowsily how long it was since I had played on a piano. More than a week now! I could not remember so long an abstinence from music. An overwhelming desire to play again seized me. There was that upright piano in the dining-saloon! No-one would be there at this hour of the morning! I would have the place to myself! I tossed the blankets aside, and, quivering with eagerness to get to the instrument, dressed swiftly and silently. In the suitcase under my bunk was a pile of music; there was a bigger

pile in the cabin-trunk in the hold. A copy of the Chopin 'Preludes' was uppermost. I seized it and hurried upstairs.

The dining-saloon was not so empty as I had anticipated. At the far end, away from the piano, the staff was already busied in washing and drying piles of dishes and cutlery.

At the sound of the first note of the fragile little 'A major Prelude', one of the men threw down his dish towel, and, uttering a bull-like roar, charged down on me. 'Come on, gie it a bye . . . awa' frae it . . .' he reiterated. 'That bloody pianna's been gaun day an' nicht since we left Glesca' . . . It's got me aboot aff ma heid!' His chest heaved with rage, the veins on his forehead and neck were swollen, and his eyes blazed madly.

'I'm sorry I disturbed you,' I said, lifting the music from the stand and rising to my feet.

'Hey you, leave the kid alone,' cried one of the other men.

'He's no' gaun tae play that bloody pianna if I've got tae swing for it,' cried the neurotic dishwasher. 'It's drivin' me aff ma heid . . . The mornin's the only chance we've got o' gettin' a bit o' peace.'

I returned to the cabin muttering cynically, 'Orpheus with his lute.'

§ x i

After breakfast I met the Edinburgh student. My narration of the encounter with the irate dishwasher amused him.

'It's funny,' he laughed. 'I had a similar experience yesterday morning. All through the voyage I have been strolling about the promenade deck among the Second Class passengers. So, now that it is warm enough to sit about the deck, I was bold enough to ask a steward if he could get me a deck-chair. "Certainly, sir, what is the number of your cabin, sir?" he replied very smartly. The fat was in the fire then,' laughed the student. 'I dare not go near the promenade deck now . . . The fellow was really quite savage when he discovered I was only a common or garden steerage passenger.'

We sat on a coil of rope on the fo'c'sle top. How blue the

Gulf of St. Lawrence was, its surface still as a mountain tarn; the sky cloudless, the distant cliffs of the Quebec coast that reddish-pink I had noted the previous evening!

The thick forest of pines clothing Anticosta Island from the water's edge to the tops of the hills filled me with wonder. The largest pine wood in Scotland shrank into an insignificant clump of trees beside this forest, which stretched for the whole hundred-and-forty-mile length of the island.

It was while we were talking of woods in Scotland that the student told me he intended going in for afforestation.

'I'm going as far west of Winnipeg as I can get with this cheap half-cent-a-mile fare,' he said. 'I want to see the big Douglas firs in British Columbia, and pick up as much information as I can about Canadian methods of afforestation. It seemed a good way of spending the summer vacation when I saw this harvesting scheme advertised in the papers.'

Our talk drifted to other things, then trailed off into silence. The warmth of the sun was glorious; the decks burned under the palms of my hand when I leaned back and gazed at the crowded deck below or the white superstructure towering up to the bridge, where the gulls gleamed dazzlingly white against the thick cloud of smoke pouring from the single funnel.

My spirits soared. I would do great things in Canada! Four dollars a day in the harvest fields! How long did harvesting last? . . . Say ten weeks . . . Two hundred and forty dollars to go into some city with to look around for something better to do than farm work! I made mental calculations and saw myself sailing back to Scotland at forty years of age with sufficient money to enable me to devote the remainder of my life to music. It was a delightful idea to play with. I would begin my life again with a grand tour of the concert halls of Europe!

Below me as I day-dreamed, a crowd of ragged Clydesiders played 'Housey-house' on top of the forward hatch. I grew interested in them. A card was dealt each player and laid face down; dice were rattled and thrown while the 'Houseyman' chanted a weird jargon . . . 'Number nine' . . . 'Sixty-six' . . . 'Legs eleven' . . . 'Clickety-click' . . . 'Top of the house'

... 'The Old Man spits blood' ... The phrases rose above the other sounds on the deck. The feverish movements of the players betrayed the grip gambling had on their whole being. Men came round now and then and pestered us to buy tickets for a raffle or sweepstake, anxious, now that the voyage was drawing to an end, to recoup their gambling losses or what they had spent in the bar.

In another section of the deck, where an accordionist played with a rapt expression on his face, the few buxom country wenches on board were in great demand as dancing partners.

Somewhere aft, the piper skirled to his heart's content. The tempo of life on board the *Marburn* had suddenly changed from 'molto adagio' to a sprightly 'allegro'.

My friend the student went off to write a letter, and, as I paced the deck alone a little later, a small swarthy fellow, with a shock of dark hair, and a brown woollen jersey over his broad chest, grinned in friendly way and fell into step with me.

'I saw ye playin' chess the ither day,' he began. 'Ye'll hae tae have a game wi' me. I've got a wee pocket set o' ma ain ... It's a rare game, but it's no' often that ye can get a man tae play wi' ... I havenae been able tae get a game since I left Glesca.'

He talked of unemployment in Glasgow and of the 'dole'.

'Ach, I got fed-up daein' nothin', so, when I saw this harvestin' thing advertised a' ower the place, I says tae the wife, "I'm gettin' oot o' this damned country an' I'm gaun tae hae a shot at Canada" ... An' here I am ... It was rotten leavin' her an' the twa wains behind,' he added with a wry smile on his honest face, 'but we didnae want tae sell up the furniture until I was in a steady job oot here.'

The little Glaswegian had many interesting things to tell about the life he had led in the shipyards of the Clyde; he said he had wished to speak to me all morning. 'I was feart ye were wan o' the stuck-up mugs that wouldnae be wantin' tae speak tae the likes o' me,' he confessed as we leant on the ship's rail and stared at the distant coast of Quebec.

The greater part of the afternoon I spent in writing letters. A school of whales sunning themselves on the surface of the glassy sea created a diversion and provided the wags from the Clydeside with an opportunity of displaying their wit. One ragged fellow bawled out from the midst of his ribald associates, 'Wha's got a pin an' a bit o' string? . . . I want tae catch wan for ma tea' . . . 'Hey, Tam, how wid ye like tae find wan o' they boys in a poke o' chips?'

I was in great good humour as I sat on my bunk that evening talking of the places that had fired my imagination as a boy. The Rockies! The prairies of the West! Alaska! Niagara Falls! The skyscrapers of New York! The forests of Ontario!

'Huh,' interrupted Ralph in a tone of infinite contempt. 'Who's caring about looking at scenery? We came out here to get on; to make money; this is no Cooks' tour as far as we are concerned.'

'You know, this is a serious business for us,' added Owen. 'We haven't got fathers with old-established businesses behind us to fall back on if things don't go right . . . This isn't a holiday for us, remember.'

The calm serenity of my mood was quickly lashed into an indignant storm by this sudden squall of criticism.

'Who's got his father behind him?' I demanded angrily. 'This is just as serious for me as anyone else. I came out here to make my own way in the world, not for amusement as you seem to think, and I don't see why you should jump on me because I talk about places I have always wanted to see.'

'Christ,' jibed Ralph. 'Who the hell's going to employ *you*?'

'What do you propose doing when you get to Winnipeg?' asked Owen in a lofty manner.

'Why,' I said, bewildered and dismayed by the atmosphere of hostility, 'get a job on a farm as we talked about.'

'A job on a farm,' jeered Ralph. 'Do you know what the work will be like? . . . G'wan, you bloody fool, a day's work would kill you.'

'What the blazes do you mean?' I demanded heatedly. 'I'm a dashed sight stronger physically than you or anybody else in this cabin.'

'Aye, but your muscles are nae used tae workin' fra mornin' till nicht, like fellows like me that have had tae work for their livin' since they left the schule,' interposed Will, who had been silent up till now.

'What about your piano-playing?' jeered Ralph. 'When you start doing manual labour, your fingers'll stiffen up . . . they'll get rigid, just like pokers . . . you'll feel it ten times worse than a man who's been used to working with his hands.' Ralph seemed to take a fiendish delight in tormenting me, he knew I would never raise my hands to anyone save in self-defence, as I was afraid of injuring my wrists and fingers. 'You'll get muscle-bound and never be able to play again,' he laughed with malicious glee.

I was completely silenced. Never be able to play the piano again! I grew cold at the thought. My whole life was bound up in my music!

I told myself later that our quarrel had been a case of pure nerves owing to our having been confined in that tiny cabin for over a week. Once the storm subsided I forgot most of what had been said. But I could not forget that reference to my hands with their long thickish fingers which could play a tenth and stretch eleven notes on the piano. Though white and soft and supple, they were strong enough to bend iron bars with, as I had often done when boasting of my strength to my father's apprentices. Would they really become stiff and horny and gnarled, like the roots of a stunted tree? I shuddered at the thought and strove to banish Ralph's words from my mind.

§ XIII

There was an unusual bustle on deck next morning. Seamen ordered us away from the fo'c'sle top, to test winches and attend to mooring ropes. Hatches were opened and great piles

of luggage hoisted on deck. We were well into the River St. Lawrence now. High rounded hills loomed above us, grass grown to the top like the Lowland hills of Scotland; the banks of the broad muddy river were dotted with the farms of 'habitants' and clusters of red-roofed, white-walled houses, gathered round tiny wooden churches surmounted by tin-sheathed spires or plain crosses, slipped past at intervals. It was all very peaceful and pastoral, but much more vivid than my Scottish eyes were accustomed to; nature had used rawer pigments in painting Canada than grey misty Scotland.

I was vaguely disappointed. Having heard so often that the voyage up the St. Lawrence was one of the scenic wonders of the world, I had expected something tremendous and awe-inspiring. But, if these were the Laurentian mountains, they were tame in comparison with the rugged grandeur of Arran, and lacked besides the rich purple of heather!

A single row of brightly painted wooden huts lined every other sandy beach; tiny bronzed figures in bathing suits waved at the passing ship, and little yachts clipped along, heeling over at dangerous angles.

Islands slid past, large and small, mostly very flat, and with farm buildings set amid cultivated fields, and pastures where cattle and horses sought the shade of magnificent trees. It was strange to see an ocean-going ship swing round a bend in the midst of such pastoral scenes.

Excitement increased among the steerage passengers, with every mile. Quebec was always 'round the next bend'; rumour had it that the *Doric* was two days ahead of us, with its passengers already at Winnipeg.

Before lunch we held a conference in the cabin. Owen and Will having only a few dollars in their possession, were perturbed about not having sufficient 'landing money'. 'They're tellin' me that they'll no' let ye land unless ye've got at least ten dollars on ye,' said Will as they discussed the situation.

In the pocket of a broad belt I wore next my skin I had seventy-five dollars, all my worldly wealth. I began fishing for my money, saying, 'I can lend you fellows as much as you need to get ashore with.' Handing them ten dollars each I

said they would do the same for me any time I was in need. Was that not the reason we had banded together? — to help one another!

When Charlie appeared with his mop, Owen, after a little impromptu speech, handed him the four dollars we had pooled.

'Oh, many thanks, sir,' beamed Charlie, touching his cap as he stowed the money into his pocket. 'It's been a pleasure attending you young gentlemen. In some of the other cabins they treat me like a bit of dirt; expect me to wait on them hand and foot . . . men that've never seen anything better than some stinkin' hole in a slum . . . That kind expect more attention than a first-class passenger on the *Berengaria*. It's always the same with scum that's never been used to anythin' . . . Whenever they get the chance of bossin' anybody about, they like to make his life a hell.' Charlie talked with the infinite scorn of one who has served 'great moneyed folks in his time'.

'But you can always tell a real toff by the way he asks you to do something for him,' went on Charlie with a change of tone. 'It's a pleasure to do things for them that treats you like a human bein' an' has a cheery word an' a smile for a fellow.'

'Now, none of you fellows has been in Canada before,' he continued, 'and, if you don't mind takin' it from me, I'd like to give you a bit of advice. Get away from Montreal as far as you can . . . It's a fine place to call at, mind you; I've nothin' against Montreal in that way; I've had some "bon" nights there. But it's "napoo" looking for a job in Montreal.'

Charlie painted a sombre picture of labour conditions in Montreal then modulated to a gayer theme, that of French-Canadian girls. 'But the girls . . . Oo! La-la!' he cried with shining eyes, blowing an ecstatic kiss ceilingwards and describing voluptuous curves in the air with his hands, expressive of the divine forms he envisaged.

Charlie went into rhapsodies and described Montreal's proletarian beauties in great but unprintable detail.

CHAPTER II

§ I

QUEBEC at last! The first object to arrest my attention was the huge Château Frontenac Hotel perched on the heights, dominating the huddled mass of steep-roofed tenement houses which flowed round the base of the disappointingly low cliffs.

Dreaming over history books at school, I had pictured those steep slopes as dizzy awe-inspiring precipices, and perhaps the shattering of that illusion was the cause of forgetting what my harassed teachers had taught me about the dying Wolfe.

I trembled with excitement as I drank in the scene.

My enthusiasm cooled slightly as the ship drew closer to the quay. The tenements seemed as mean as those in the dock areas of Glasgow! The residential town of Levis, crowning the heights on the eastern side of the St. Lawrence, had a more reassuring look!

A few lean destroyers with white ensigns drooping listlessly at their sterns, lay anchored in mid-stream among various merchant ships. Under the fierce August sun, the whole scene was a riot of colour, hard and shrill to my northern eyes.

'There's the *Doric*, hurrah! We've beaten her!' The sudden cry went up as the graceful two-funnelled liner swung round the bend in the river caused by the wooded Island of Orleans. A roar of triumph arose from the decks of the *Marburn*.

Hemmed in by an excited crowd, who pushed, snarled, cursed, laughed, and joked, I was swept to the gangway. I hurried down it with wildly beating heart. How strangely rigid, solid ground felt underfoot after ten days at sea! I experienced a fleeting moment of exultation. I was standing on Canadian soil and had realized one of the great ambitions of my boyhood.

Following the men in front down a long wooden tunnel, I entered a vast barren hall where uniformed Immigration

officers herded us towards rows of hard forms and told us to sit down and wait till we were called.

During the irritating tedium of the following hours, my too lively imagination tortured me. What formalities lay in front of us before we were permitted to leave the building? A strict medical examination would reveal the fact that I was half blind in one eye! A sudden fear seized me that this defect might be the cause of my being rejected as physically unfit and sent back to Scotland, so, though the heat in the building was thunderously oppressive, I sat shivering apprehensively. Fresh batches of immigrants kept pouring into the hall. The peculiar odour which emanates from unwashed humanity sickened me, and the continual babble of voices gave me a headache. I grew hungry and tired.

At length we were told to line up in single file for medical examination.

When my turn came, the doctor, without a word, placed his hands on my shoulders, stared intently, with a cold professional gaze, into my eyes, gave a quick searching glance over my face and throat, turned me round, looked at the back of my neck and behind my ears, then, with a curt nod, motioned me on.

Heaving a sigh of relief I picked up my bag, only to find myself confronted by a tall uniformed female, who looked down at me and smiled in a sad wistful way when she asked, 'Have you any friends in Canada?'

'Why, yes,' I replied brightly. 'I know people in Montreal, Winnipeg, Regina, and Vancouver, and in New York, Pittsburg, and Detroit.'

'You are a very fortunate boy then,' she replied in a gentle voice.

'Now, what the deuce did she mean by that?' I asked myself. 'Howmuchmoneyyougotinyourpossession?' gabbled a stout man at a desk.

'Fifty dollars,' I replied.

'Pass on,' he rapped out as he scribbled in his ledger.

We found ourselves in the C.P.R. depot. The noise, bustle, and strangeness of everything, bewildered me. My whole

system had been disordered by the voyage and everything looked a little phantasmagoric. I felt afraid of being lost.

Men stationed beside large wickerwork hampers bawled raucously. 'Boxes of food for the Harvesters goin' to Winnipeg, two dollars! . . . No chance of gettin' food on the train! . . . This way, two dollars a box!'

'Nope, there's no chance of gettin' food between here an' Winnipeg,' a shifty-eyed vendor assured us when we bought two cardboard boxes packed with tins of baked beans, pressed beef, salmon, and little rolls of bread and packets of cream crackers.

'Hadn't we better be getting into the train and securing decent seats?' I said nervously for about the sixth time.

'Aw, shut up, there's tons of time; you would think you were a kid to hear you talk,' said Ralph irritably. The taciturn Will greeted Ralph's words with a grunt of approval. I relapsed into silence, feeling that from their complacent, unimaginative, common sense point of view, their irritation at my feverish excitement at finding myself in a strange country for the first time was justified.

§ 11

The heavy luggage from the ship's hold had meantime been laid out along one of the platforms. We were told to station ourselves beside our belongings until the arrival of the customs officers.

'Anything to declare?' asked a thick-set ruddy-faced officer, coming up to us chalk in hand. 'No bottles of Scotch, eh?' he chuckled when Owen grinningly told him how much opium and how many diamonds were stowed away in his suitcase.

'What the hell did you bring this for?' said Ralph testily, giving my cabin-trunk a tap with his toe. 'What do you want with all the stuff in there? . . . You can't move about the country dragging this trunk with you everywhere you go. Look at us! . . . We've only brought what we can carry in our hands. Your mother should have had more sense than to send

you out to Canada with about a ton of luggage. It's only a lot of pure swank. Ha, ha!' he mocked, 'you'll look fine cleaning out the byre in an evening suit.'

'All I've got in the world is in that trunk,' I snapped back. 'What use would my clothes be lying back in Scotland? . . . And look here, Roscoe!' I cried, beginning to lose control of myself, 'you mind your own damned business in future or I'll . . .'

'Now, now, naughty, naughty!' broke in the tactful Owen. 'Ickle boys mustn't fight, or ickle boys get ums bottom smacked.'

Despite my anger I was forced to laugh at Owen's impersonation of a reproving nursemaid.

Peace restored, we made our way towards our train. Bundling into one of the huge cumbersome coaches, we secured a 'section', consisting of four seats, with a table between. The cinema had already familiarized me with the interior of American railway coaches; their great length, height, absence of separate compartments, and so on.

There were about sixty men in the coach, all shouting, singing snatches of popular songs, wrangling about seats, and hulloo-ing out of the open windows to comrades scurrying about the platform. Long ere this, the sun had been blotted out by an ominous thunder cloud; the air was tense and heavily charged with electricity, the partial cause of my headache and ragged nerves.

I sat at the open window gasping for air. At intervals, huge ugly locomotives, with cow-catchers and warning bells tolling, shunted into my line of vision, belching clouds of gritty smoke. How dirty and uncared for they looked, after the neatness, the fresh paintwork and highly polished metal-work, of the locomotives at home! The station was a dingy place; littered with scraps of paper; the houses I had seen around the docks had looked squalid; some of the men in the station waiting-hall had looked anything but prosperous! Quebec at close quarters was unromantic and a little perturbing!

With a devastating peal of thunder the storm broke over our heads. A few minutes later the coach was jerked into motion

with a violence that, taking us unawares, almost hurled us to the floor; several times the coach seemed to be lifted bodily up and down; our teeth rattled in our heads; startled oaths came from the men around, which changed to laughter when they divined that this terrific jolting was merely a Canadian train getting into motion in its usual manner. Once under way, however, the coach ran smoothly, swaying up and down gently.

Ravenously hungry we fell on the boxes of provisions. The train crawled at walking pace, jolting over switches, and passing numerous level crossings, where pedestrians and motor traffic awaited our passing. I looked curiously down the lighted streets. The houses were all of wood, with wooden shingles on the roofs instead of slates. There seemed to be innumerable timberyards. But surely Quebec was not typical of all Canadian cities? Those ramshackle houses were not in keeping with the villa-crowned heights of Levis, and the Château Frontenac Hotel! Was it possible that there were poor people in Canada as well as rich? I hurriedly dismissed the alarming thought.

Thunder rolled and rattled across the heavens; livid flashes of lightning lit up the murkiness and gloom of the oncoming night, and big warm drops of rain splashed in my face, forcing me to close the window.

Optimism reigned in the coach. My fellow travellers displayed all the levity and derision that the sight of unfamiliar modes of dress, speech, and ways of living arouses in the working-class Britisher.

The upper berths were let down from the roof, and the seats were pulled out and converted into bunks capable of sleeping two. Ralph and Owen elected to sleep in the upper berth.

Long after the others had gone to sleep, I sat staring out into the storm. Vivid flashes of forked lightning showed momentary glimpses of long slanting spears of rain, trees bowing before the wind, and cattle huddling in fields near small lonely farms. The land, in that weird light, looked like parts of Scotland where men work from dawn till sunset striving to wrest a bare living from a stubborn soil. What I saw bore no resemblance to

the Canada I had visualized. In vain I tried to picture myself as the owner of one of these little farms.

Weariness crept over me and blotted out all consciousness.

§ 111

A cock crowing lustily; cattle bellowing; the sound of footsteps on wooden planks, and voices talking in unfamiliar accents, wakened me out of a fitful sleep. Retaining hazy impressions of thunderstorms, and men moving around me talking of 'Three Rivers' and later 'Ottawa', I lifted the window blind and looked out. Painted in neat white letters, the name 'Smith's Falls' stared me in the face. Some cell in the recesses of my brain was stirred. I groped in the mists of sleep and memory then sat up with a jerk. It all flashed back again. I was once more standing in a street at home, talking to a maiden great-aunt from Glasgow who had come down to see me before I sailed.

'He's gaun awa' tae Canada tae mak' his fortune,' she said to the friend with me. 'He'll gang oot tae his uncle Jimmy in Smith's Falls, and he'll get on juist as he did . . . Naw! naw! ye neednae laugh . . . Juist you wait till he comes hame wi' his pooches fu' o' gold like his uncle Jimmy when he cam' back frae the gold-diggings in California.'

Half-hidden by trees, the town lay back from the railroad. It had a tranquil look in the pale dawn, with the sky above it turning opalescent. Winnipeg, with what lay beyond, was a thousand miles away! There might be security and future prosperity in this peaceful spot, farming and lumbering among my kinsfolk! How simple it would be to leave my sleeping companions. All my youthful Quixotic ideals of honour and loyalty rose in arms against the ideas. No, we had sworn to stand together through thick and thin! No-one was going to be able to say that I deserted my comrades at the first opportunity!

The locomotive bell began tolling, and, with a sudden jolt the train moved on.

§ I V

When next I opened my eyes the sun was well up and the coach had stirred to life. In a world of pine-clad hills, the train crawled high above the south bank of the Ottawa River. A thrill shot through me at the sight of a log boom, its myriad of floating logs looking no bigger than matchsticks. I forgot my stiff limbs and weariness at the sight, and thought of Ralph Connor's *Man from Glengarry*, and the great adventure I had launched myself out on.

We made merry over an improvised breakfast.

A running commentary was kept up on all that could be seen through the open windows, and much speculation about the future was interspersed with humorous stories, little practical jokes, and much laughter.

Watching my compatriots expand before my eyes I began to appreciate a favourite saying of an overseas uncle that, 'A Scot only begins to live when he leaves his native land'.

By the time we had reached Sudbury, pale-faced cowboys with huge broad-brimmed Stetson hats and coloured kerchiefs were swaggering through the coach. Not till I heard them speak in the broadest of Scots dialects did I realize that they were merely Harvesters like myself, acquiring local colour.

The day passed in drinking in the gradually unfolding panorama of virgin forest, river, lake, and farm land which appeared to have been cleared of trees with infinite toil, and in watching the comedy of life in our coach.

Like some ultra-modern symphonic poem, the voices around me mingled with the grinding and roaring of the wheels beneath into a cacophonic whole; the panting of the locomotive sounded like double-basses scrubbing out a furious ground bass. As the railroad was but a single track we had long halts at intervals to permit east-bound trains to pass. Sometimes we stopped in the forest, sometimes at one of the small shanty towns which had usually one straggling row of stores facing the railroad. The Harvesters descended on those

villages in a vociferous swarm, bent on seeing the sights, questioning the inhabitants, and purchasing bread, butter, cheese, milk, and eggs, at prices far in excess of those in Scotland.

The number of new houses and stores being built, and the demands for lumberjacks and teamsters chalked on blackboards displayed at the doors of employment bureaus, seemed to me an encouraging sign of prosperity.

I saw my first Indians during one of these halts. Dressed in shabby working clothes, with battered felt hats down over their eyes, they were lounging against the counter of the one dingy store in a clachan of half a dozen wretched shacks.

As the two medium-sized men with their high-ridged cheek-bones, hawk-like noses, and duskily-red complexions, returned my frank stare, I recalled the 'Buffalo Bill Weeklies' I had read, the early Wild West days of the cinema, and the games of 'Cowboys and Injuns' I had played as a small grubby child.

From my vantage point at the coach window, life in Canada seemed a blissful idyllic existence. I had a glimpse once of a man striding along a dusty trail, rod on shoulder, three great silver-bellied fish on a string, making for a log hut, in the doorway of which was framed a slim girlish figure in khaki, waving a welcome. Against a background of dark forest, the poetry in the scene brought tears to my eyes. Would anyone ever welcome me like that! I suddenly found myself contemplating my own aching loneliness, and indulging in the brooding thoughts and self-dramatizings common to my time of life, seeing myself grey and old and unloved, and all the rest of it.

§ v

When we drew into Port Arthur late in the afternoon of the next day, I gazed with wonder at the biggest grain elevators in the world. The colossal dimensions of the rows of grey concrete cylinders ranged along the lakeside would have gladdened the eyes of the mightiest of the Pharaohs, I thought.

Beside them, the long, shallow-draughted lake boats seemed like toys.

By this time my impressions of the journey had merged into a blur of fire-blasted forest, great hummocky hills revealing naked ribs of rock, of trains crawling along reddish cliff-faces overhanging a vast blue lake with a wide empty horizon, of hamlets of dingy grey shacks and new bungalows in all their virginity of white paint and red shingle, of huge saw-mills and ugly railroad 'divisional' points with coal dumps, watertanks, and locomotive roundhouses, and of a lonely road running alongside the railroad through the wilderness, making me long for my motor-cycle again.

My mind reeled at the vastness of Canada; I experienced that bewildered feeling one has after wandering through a large picture gallery for the first time. From the sparseness of the little towns and the settlers between them, and surmising that what population there was lived as near the railroad as possible, I concluded that the white man had gained only a mere precarious foothold on this Ontarian wilderness, through which I had already travelled a thousand miles.

The smartly dressed Canadians on the wide platform of the depot at Port Arthur stared in open wonderment when our train stopped and the Harvesters rushed pell-mell for the street.

Owen, Ralph, Will and I strolled leisurely through the station and came out into a well-paved sunlit road. A touring car with the hood up to shelter the driver, not from driving rain as at home, but from the heat of the sun, drew up beside us. 'Say,' said the driver, a grey-lipped middle-aged man, 'can you fellows tell me what all this is about anyway?' He indicated a group of Clydeside tatterdemalions with a wave of his hand. 'Who are these guys? . . . What they doin' here? . . . Where d'you come from? . . . Where you goin'?'

When we told him about the C.P.R.'s harvesting scheme he looked us up and down with narrowed critical eyes. 'Oh! so you're goin' harvestin' eh! . . . That's the game is it?' he said nodding to himself. Something in the intonation of his voice reminded me of the woman in Quebec who told me I was

fortunate in having friends in the country. They both appeared to be in possession of some knowledge which had been withheld from us!

'Well, good luck boys!' said the motorist as he slipped into bottom gear and drove away.

§ V I

The sun went down on a desolation of tumbled rock, steel-surfaced tarns, and fire-blackened tree trunks.

I brooded over the scene.

The music I composed for an imaginary orchestra as I watched the flaring colours die out of the west, was not scored for muted strings and horns, but for the rich brassy instruments, the tragic tubas, trumpets, trombones, 'cellos and double-basses, so beloved of the Romantic school of composers, under whose spell my young mind had fallen.

What would the next day bring? That was the leading motif of my imaginary symphonic poem. Though I was nearing the end of my journey the adventure itself had not begun yet. I, who had been all my days surrounded by friends, and had never lacked a meal or a roof over my head, would from the next day be dependent on the fruits of my own efforts for the smallest trifles as well as the important necessities of life!

'This harvestin' stunt's only a game of the C.P.R.'s to get their boats filled,' I had heard a man say earlier in the day. 'I've been out in Canada before,' he went on, 'the country's got all the men it needs; the cities are full of unemployed.'

His words added to Ralph's jeering. 'A day's work would kill you,' haunted my symphony — sombre motifs in minor keys which brought vague fears in their train. My imagination was getting the better of me! It was only the strain of my five thousand mile journey beginning to tell! I would work till I dropped down dead rather than let anyone jeer and cry at me 'I told you so!'

Full of great resolves I set my imaginary orchestra playing in bright triumphant major keys, and presently fell asleep.

§ V I I

The roaring of the train invading my sleep forced me back into consciousness. Wearily I opened my eyes. The train had accelerated to double the speed it had crawled across the Ontarian wilderness at. Outside, the world was all misty, with greyness creeping into the night. Imperceptibly it grew lighter. A ghostly farmhouse slid past. Where were we? I sat up. The mist began to disperse and the sky to turn to mother-of-pearl. I saw long straight lines of wire fence stretching out into the dispersing mist. All at once I looked over a plain stretching level as a calm sea to the horizon. Why! I shouted within myself, my heart giving a great bound, 'It's the prairie!'

With a magnificent dramatic gesture the sun flared up, revealing the whole plain, save for wide scattered farmsteads whose red-roofed barns rose above windscreens of willows, to be carpeted with the rich gold of ripened grain.

My weariness vanished. When I leaned out of the window and looked ahead, I saw tiny white blocks above the rim of the horizon. As they grew in size, others appeared, grey and red in colour, revealing themselves as many storied office buildings with myriads of windows flashing in the rising sun.

We were running through the suburbs of Winnipeg, trim avenues of toy villas and bungalows, a picture in raw reds, browns, greens and whites, that might have been laid on a canvas with the palette knife of a Van Gogh, when Owen turned to me and said, referring to friends who had emigrated from Paisley a decade earlier, 'I say, Jim, you had better look out for the Reimers when we get in; your mother said she'd written to them, so I expect they'll be waiting for you.'

I scoffed at the idea of anyone getting out of bed at sunrise to meet one they had known as a small schoolboy ten years previously.

But Owen was right, for, when we reached the street, I spied three figures standing among a crowd anxiously scanning the faces of the immigrants streaming into the road-

way from the C.P.R. depot — a middle-aged lady and gentleman, and a slim young man who rushed towards me.

'Gee, Jim,' he cried, pumping my hand vigorously, 'I'm sure glad to see you boy; gosh, but you've grown since I saw you last.' Max Reimer's frank open countenance beamed a welcome which made all the hardships of the journey seem worth while.

'Thanks, Max,' was all I had time to say before his father and mother descended on me. A general chorus of greetings and introductions followed, then Mrs. Reimer said, 'Now folks, come along and have some breakfast.'

'Come on, don't be looney; gee whilikins, you'd think we met folks from the Old Country every day to hear you talk,' cried Max when Owen protested that Ralph, Will, and himself would fend for themselves in some café or other. 'Come on, there's the old boat over there, pile in boys,' he went on, shepherding us towards a Dodge touring car.

We piled in; Ralph and I in the rear seat beside Mr. and Mrs. Reimer. It was the third time they had been to the C.P.R. depot that morning, our train was hours late, they told us. 'Gee,' cried the exuberant Max from the wheel, 'we ain't had a wink of sleep. Gosh, but weren't we just scared that we'd miss you.' He had turned into the widest thoroughfare I had ever seen, being deserted at that early hour it appeared doubly broad. 'Yes, sir,' chanted Max, beginning to hymn the praises of his adopted city, 'L'il ole Winnipeg can show 'em a thing or two . . . A hundred an' thirty feet wide is our ole Main Street . . . Say, we got the widest streets in the world right here in Winnipeg, yes sir. But you ain't seen anythin' yet . . . Wait till you see Portage Avenue an' Eaton's Store.'

Main Street was lined with an amazing assortment of buildings; crude frame-built junk shops nestled at the base of gaunt ten-storied office blocks. All the violent contrasts between relics of the rude pioneering days of yesterday and the modern commercial architecture of to-day which I had noted since landing at Quebec were heavily emphasized in Main Street.

Mr. and Mrs. Reimer were hungry for news of old friends

and acquaintances. We swung round a corner and drove down another street, as wide as Main Street, but lined with much finer buildings. 'This is Portage Avenue now,' cried our guide. 'Eh boys! what'ya think of it?'

I had a hazy impression of tall office buildings, fine shops, shops with strange names such as Candies, Cafeteria, Drug-store; of a white-tiled Childs' restaurant, a red-faced Woolworths, the façades of cinemas and vaudeville houses, and one huge eight-storied departmental store stretching for an entire block. 'That's Eaton's,' cried Max as we whirled past the latter building, 'the biggest store in Canada, outside Toronto.'

'What are your plans? What would you like to do?' Mr. and Mrs. Reimer asked me as we ran out into the suburbs.

'Well, we're going out harvesting to begin with,' I replied. 'Then, when we've made a little capital, we'll have a look round the cities and learn the ropes.'

'But,' said Mrs. Reimer, evidently not impressed by this scheme, 'wouldn't you rather stay in the city altogether, and look round and try and get something to do before the "Fall"? We thought you'd come and live with us for a bit while you were looking about you. We'd be only too glad to scout around among our crowd and do our best to get you fixed up.'

'How is business in Winnipeg?' I asked, after thanking Mrs. Reimer for her hospitable offer.

'Well, Jim, to tell you the truth, it's not too bright right now; there's lots of folks bumming around the city out of work. But of course, in a young country like this you never know the minute things'll go booming sky-high.'

This intelligence disturbed me. So trade depressions were not confined to Europe, and people prowled about the streets of Winnipeg looking for work just as in Glasgow!

'No, I think I'll stick to the harvesting scheme,' I said. 'We've come all this way together, and I'm not going to desert my friends now.'

'Don't you worry about us, Jim,' cried Owen over his shoulder. 'We can look after ourselves all right; you just carry on and look after yourself.'

I was adamant in the face of all argument, chiefly because the idea of office-work was repellent.

Turning into an avenue, we drew up before a bijou villa.

Indoors we met Max's sister Natalie, and Otto, his younger brother.

'Goin' out on the farm!' shrieked the twenty-three year old Natalie in horror when apprised of my resolution. 'Gee, you must be crazy!'

'Say, boys, you must be nuts!' cried Otto, aged twenty, in his high-pitched incisive voice. 'Ho ho! you suckers don't know nothin' yet. Stookin' for a lotta lousy Doukhobors an' Bohunks! Say! . . . Gosh! wait'll you gotta eat a lotta garlic an' muck, an' sleep in a barn or under a threshin' machine, an' then find when you've been workin' about six weeks, that the guy that hired you's got no dough an' you gotta go without your wages.'

'Aw, you shut your face, you sap,' broke in Max with a warmth that told me I had a good friend in him.

After breakfast, with its chatter about the journey, comparisons between Scottish and Canadian food, tailoring, and domestic affairs, after laughter over the way the storekeepers in the little towns en route had defrauded us by charging double current prices for butter, bread, and eggs, we held a council of war, and decided to quit Winnipeg by the first west-bound train.

Mr. Reimer, Natalie, and Otto had rushed off to business, leaving Max, who was in business with his father, to do the honours of the city until our departure.

Mrs. Reimer was distressed at the brevity of my stay; but, having visions of trainload after trainload of harvesters hurtling across Ontario in our rear, we made our excuses and bade her farewell.

When we were seated in his Dodge again, Max said as he put his foot on the self-starter, 'Where do we go first, boys?'

'I think we'd better see about our train first,' replied Owen.

'Righto, the C.P.R. depot, off we go,' cried Max gaily, slipping into bottom gear.

Winnipeg was wideawake now. Never had I seen so many automobiles on a road at once. In a solid river, two deep, they

flowed towards the down-town area, and, on the other side of Portage Avenue, two deep they flowed out towards the prairie, while in between the two streams, monstrous yellow painted single-decked street cars thundered up and down.

'Say, we got fifty thousand autos in this l'il ole burg, yes sir,' cried Max, gloating over our open-eyed wonderment. 'An' we got a population of three hundred an' fifty thou', though some say less . . . Anyway it makes about one car for every seven people in the city. Gee, can you beat it?' he exulted, glorying in the raw youthful vigour of Winnipeg.

Temporary wooden huts had been erected outside the C.P.R. depot, one for each of the three prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Here we found hordes of Harvesters procuring advice, sheaves of pamphlets, and railroad tickets to western farm towns.

All sorts of contradictory rumours were flying from mouth to mouth. The wheat crop was ruined! There was a surplus of Canadian labour! There was a shortage of labour everywhere and the harvest was going to be a record one!

We argued hotly about the next stage of our journey. I was for going as far west as possible; the demon who had enticed me so far from Scotland was now beckoning from Alberta and the Rocky Mountains.

'Don't let us go too far away, or we'll be spending all we earn on train fares,' cautioned Owen. 'Remember we've got to come back to Winnipeg when the harvest's over as there'll be no work in the country then.'

The immigration agent we sought advice from supported Owen's argument. 'If you go west to Saskatoon, Regina, or Edmonton right now, you'll have to sit around for two or three weeks waitin' till the farmers are ready for stookin,' he said. 'You see, boys, the crops ripen later the further west you go. My advice to you boys is to book for Portage-la-Prairie, where you'll be able to start at once . . . They're calling out for men right now at Portage.'

I fell in with the others and purchased a railroad ticket for Portage-la-Prairie, the first town west of Winnipeg.

We were each given a long strip of blue paper with much

printed matter on it, which, when signed by a farmer, declared that the possessor had worked for so many weeks on a farm and so qualified for special reduced railroad fares to Montreal and a steamship passage back to Britain for ninety dollars.

The Edinburgh student made his way through the crowd towards me. 'Hullo, old chap,' he said, greeting me warmly. 'Have you decided where you're going to?'

'I've just booked for Portage-la-Prairie,' I replied.

'Portage-la-Prairie, where the deuce is that? Oh, only about sixty miles. I've got a ticket here for Calgary,' he cried jubilantly. 'That's as far west as they'd let me go with this cent-a-mile fare. They told me I would require to pay full fare if I went beyond that. I thought I had better not let them think I was only a tourist in case they ran me in for travelling under false pretences or something like that,' he laughed.

'Lucky dog,' I said, looking at his ticket enviously. I quelled with difficulty a sudden impulse to go off with him.

'I want to deposit some money in a bank,' I said to Max when I rejoined my friends. 'Which is the soundest bank in Canada?' Much talking during breakfast about the recent failure of the Home Bank of Canada had aroused all my native caution.

'Oh, there's lots of good banks,' replied Max cheerfully, beginning a dissertation on Canadian banking which lasted all the way back to Portage Avenue. 'Here's a good bank,' he said, swerving skilfully into a gap in the long rank of cars parked head on to the sidewalk. He led me into a branch of the Standard Bank, where, thinking that the less money I took with me to the harvest fields the better, I deposited forty dollars.

For the next two hours Max drove us round the city and its environs. Max's racy Canadian slang and breezy optimism were exhilarating. I forgot that it was a fortnight since I had known an unbroken night's sleep. The vigour of the smartly dressed Winnipegians — straw-hatted men, and women in gay flimsy summer dresses, bustling about the hot crowded streets and boulevards, was reassuring; my fleeting impressions were of material well-being and rising prosperity. Yes, I had done

well in coming out to Canada, things were happening here, there was none of the growing lassitude of Scotland!

To one familiar with the fogs of Glasgow, the crystalline atmosphere, causing every object to stand out vividly clear-cut was amazing for a city.

The new Parliament Building stands on the north bank of the Assiniboine River, about half a mile from its junction with the Red River. Max stopped the car and talked about the building of it. 'Gee, but there sure was some graft in the building of that pile,' he cried. 'It cost seven million dollars . . . Yes, sir, seven million solid iron men. One guy made a million in graft out of it. But they grabbed him . . . he got two years . . . Gosh! I'd do two years in Stony Mountain myself for a million bucks.'

I admired the massive white structure whose copper cupola was surmounted by a Greek figure in bronze; I was more familiar with crumbling castles and abbeys, and relics of Victorian and Edwardian prosperity, than this twentieth century architecture of steel and cement.

'Say, you gotta see our freight yards, the biggest in the world,' cried Max. He rushed us across the city to look at a vast network of railroad lines from a footbridge over them.

'Now I'll show you one of our parks,' he said, dashing off in another direction. I had a glimpse of a spacious park where elk and buffalo grazed, and where we looked at two shaggy bears in a pit. Max talked of an annual exodus of business men in the 'Fall' to hunt moose and shoot prairie-chicken in the wilds.

'Let's see, fellers,' he said, scratching his head, 'where can we go now? Oh, yep, I've got it . . . I'll drive you out to see our lots.' He explained that he referred to building lots, and, as we whizzed along, talked of the 'real-estate' business. 'We got some oil an' gold shares up at Porcupine Mountain,' he said enthusiastically, dilating on the natural resources of Manitoba, 'that's 'way up by Swan Lake, north of this. Everybody in Canada has a flutter in "real estate", gold, an' oil. It's all a gamble and might never come to anythin', but heck, a guy never knows when he'll strike a "gusher" or a good "reef" an' the dollars'll come sailin' his way.'

CHAPTER III

§ I

WE alighted at Portage-la-Prairie, a name redolent of early 'voyageurs', herds of buffalo, and wandering tribes of Indians. The town, an unprepossessing jumble of frame shacks, bungalows, and villas, grain elevators, ugly brick warehouses and factories, struck me as being singularly unromantic.

Crossing a network of railway lines, we entered a side street. The surface of the road was simply mud, baked by the sun and deeply rutted by motor traffic. The wooden board walks reminded Owen of the 'duck-boards' in France during the war.

Scores of Fords, Overlands, Dodges, and Chevrolets bucked and rattled along the unpaved Main Street, which was as broad as Portage Avenue in Winnipeg. But where were all the bronzed Greek gods on horseback; the Stetson-hatted, khaki-breeched, open-necked shirted men of the Emigration posters at home? These grim, hard-faced men, unshaven, collarless, in old tattered clothes, driving in from their farms in motors, looked more disreputable than the beggars wandering about the countryside at home!

'Hey, where are all the cowboys and Indians? We want our money back, we've been had,' jested Owen to the perspiring official behind the counter of the half-filled Employment Bureau.

'Nope, boys, I'm sorry it can't be done,' said the burly official, when we asked to be placed on one farm. 'There's no farmer employin' more than two men just now, they've just started stookin'. If you wait a fortnight till threshin' begins it'll be easy enough to fix you all up together, but not right now.'

'We'll have to split up,' said Owen. 'But we can always keep in touch with each other over the 'phone.'

We were fixed up on farms twenty miles apart, to stook at three and a half dollars a day.

Leaving our suitcases in the office we sallied out into Main Street in search of a meal.

Near the western end of the street we found a Chinese café. It seemed to me, with its little cubicles partitioned shoulder-high, showcases filled with chocolate and cigarette boxes, and large mirrors everywhere, to be the Canadian counterpart of the Italian cafés in Scotland.

The place was crowded with Harvesters; Clydesiders, who roared with laughter as the wags among them vied with one another in shouting obscene pidgin English at the grinning Chinese waiters.

At forty cents a head, we regaled ourselves on soup, roast pork with apple sauce and baked potatoes, and a generous slice of pie, rounded off with coffee, biscuits and cheese.

We talked animatedly as we ate and drank one another's health in iced-water, discussing our radiant prospects, our immediate surroundings, and Max Reimer's breezy optimism.

We strolled back to the Employment Bureau. The street was lined with cars, parked, as in Winnipeg, head-on to the board walks. Groups of lean tight-lipped farmers, discussing the harvest, barred our progress every few yards. Now and then we hesitated before a large plate-glass window and stared at binders, ploughs, Fordson tractors, and all kinds of agricultural implements whose names I knew not.

Late in the afternoon, a young, cheerful farmer's son drove up to the Employment Bureau to take Ralph and Owen away.

'Remember to let us know how you get on,' was Owen's last injunction.

I watched the car dwindle into the distance with mingled emotions. Their going left a vague blank somewhere!

As we carried our suitcases to the C.N.R. depot, Will and I enthused about Canada. I was only twenty years of age, and, now that I'd got a start in Canada, what could I not do with all the years before me?

'And I'm twenty-nine,' declared Will, with as much elation

as his phlegmatic soul was capable of. 'Goad! but I'm gaun tae get on noo.' Three and a hauf dollars a day an' board forbye! Goad! I never earned onything like that in my life before . . . I'll be able tae save five pounds a week.'

Oh, it was fine to be alive! I trod on air. I felt strong enough to push a house over. Scotland with its mists and rains and industrial depressions was far behind! Here was work, opportunity, progress, wealth, and sunshine . . . warm glorious sunshine! It was with difficulty that I restrained myself from leaping madly down the street, waving my arms above my head and bursting into a wild song of joy.

§ 11

It was late in the evening when we boarded our west-bound train. The sun, as it sank, turned the vast plain dark red. Darkness followed swiftly, unlike the lingering twilight of Scotland.

About an hour later the train stopped, and, the conductor having given us warning of our approaching destination, we alighted. The blackness of the night seemed palpable after the well-lighted coach; I could distinguish nothing; no railroad station; no least glimmer of light.

'We're lost,' I said to myself, limp after the excitement of the long day, and so sleepy that I could barely keep my eyes open.

'Whaur the hell are we?' came Will's perplexed voice somewhere ahead, as the train rumbled away. Peering intently into the blackness, I made out at length what I took to be the outline of a hut, then, to my relief, a horse stamped impatiently and a man's voice called loudly, 'Are you the guys from Portage-la-Prairie?'

'Yes,' we answered in a thankful unison.

'Well, git your grips an' come this way.'

Guided by the voice we moved forward cautiously, burdened with our bags and my cabin-trunk, until the black shadows of a horse and trap loomed up. The owner of the voice helped us to stow the baggage at the back of the trap, then, getting up

in front with Will, and with myself lying over the bags in the rear to prevent them falling off, whipped up the horse.

With a monotonous jingling of harness the horse jogged on; my head nodded sleepily.

At length with a start, I jerked up my head, discovering that we had come to a standstill beside a vague black mass which I guessed sleepily to be the farmhouse.

'I guess we'll leave that trunk in the basement; and better step quietly; they're all asleep,' said the voice of our employer as he preceded us into the dark silent house. A sudden blaze of electric light dazzled and surprised me; Will and I carried the trunk through a kitchen more like that of a suburban villa than any farm kitchen I had seen hitherto.

When we reached the basement and I saw our employer for the first time I got a shock. The man I saw standing before me was a lean, stringy-looking fellow, perhaps thirty years of age, of middle height, with peculiar wide-staring eyes. With his unshaven scabious chin, his tattered trousers, and expanse of hairy chest showing through the rents in his ragged collarless shirt, he presented a wild unkempt figure.

Evidently he was as astonished at my appearance as I was his, for we eyed each other up and down in silence, he looking dubiously at my plus-fours, I at his scabious chin.

'You guys'll wash down here,' he said, nodding to an enamelled basin sitting on a bench. 'Here's a couple of clean towels for you. I want you to be careful an' not use Dick's or mine,' he nodded to some towels hanging on a clothes horse. 'Those darned sores we've got on our faces are infectious; they're nothin' serious, but they're darned uncomfortable just the same . . . The doctor thinks we got them from the kid.'

'You've just come out from the Old Country, eh?' said the farmer, as we made for the steps up to the kitchen. 'Which part?' he asked, stopping and facing us again. 'Oh, you're Scotch. My dad came from Scotland. He came out West an' took over this "section" before the railroad came through this way. Say, you haven't brought a drop of Scotch with you?' he asked with a wolfish kind of eagerness. 'We got this

darned prohibition in Manitoba now, an' you can't buy the real stuff.'

'Naw,' replied Will, shaking his head. 'We havenae such a thing. I only wish we had a drap or twa,' he added thirstily.

'Aw come on,' coaxed the farmer, a greedy light in his eyes. 'You can't pull that stuff on me; no Scotsman goes without a bottle. Come on, give us a drink!' he demanded, his voice becoming harsh and jarring.

Will talked of the Customs.

'Say, you ain't goin' to fool me with that stuff,' said the farmer scornfully. 'You can slip hootch through the Customs as easy as pie. I know you've got a bottle or two in those grips . . . Out with it!'

Finally, very much disgruntled at our obstinacy, he led us upstairs to our bedroom, which, as I had been expecting to sleep in a hayloft, astonished me. The furniture was new and highly polished, the two beds had spotless sheets; there was a wardrobe with mirrored door, a dressing-table with mirrored back and toilet set, a washstand, chairs, a new carpet on the polished floor, the windows were curtained with a bright fabric and on the walls was fresh paper of an unobtrusive design.

'That's Dick, a friend from Winnipeg,' said the farmer shortly, nodding towards the sleeping man in one of the beds.

'Goad,' said Will, looking round as we undressed, 'I never expectit onything like this. It's mair like a bloomin' first-class hotel than a fairm.'

§ III

Two women moved about the kitchen, setting the breakfast table, when Will and I went downstairs next morning. A grey-haired woman, with a fine strong face and an upright carriage which spoke of pride in her Scottish ancestry, greeted us with a quietly spoken 'Good morning'. The other occupant of the kitchen, a tall thin girl with a rainbow-hued apron over her

light summer frock, moved over to a cot as a baby squalled, completely ignoring us.

Full of zeal, Will and I talked of the day's work before us as we splashed and spluttered in the basement. As I glanced around me, noting the furnace standing in the middle of the floor, with a heating pipe running up through the ceiling to the rooms above, and thinking of the white enamel and silver-plated fittings of the bathroom I had peeped into on my way downstairs, I thought how little there was of the rough pioneering log hut existence on this farm.

Our employer and Dick, who was six feet tall, and had an unshaven scabious chin also, had come in from the stable and everyone was seated by the time we had finished washing.

I had always pictured farms as merry places at harvest time — great uproarious red-faced men eating in stone-flagged low-roofed kitchens, tended by gay cherry-lipped red-cheeked damsels, and collie dogs sprawling about the floor with muzzles between forepaws. But instead of this bucolic carefree atmosphere, there was something grim and businesslike about this farm which puzzled me. I asked all sorts of questions as I ate my bacon and drank my coffee. The milk on the table was bottled, the bread was machine made. Were there no cows on the farm? No sheep? No pigs? No hens? Did farm people in Canada not bake their own bread as in Scotland? As no one else seemed inclined to talk I kept up a running fire of such questions. The grey-haired woman, who was as I had surmised, the farmer's mother, and the farmer himself, answered all my questions in the negative. The other two, Dick and the thin girl, who was the farmer's wife, ate in silence, ignoring utterly the existence of Will and myself.

'Well, do you guys know anything about stooking?' asked the farmer as we rose from the table.

'No,' we answered in unison, 'but we're willing to learn.' Had he asked me I would have been forced to admit that I hadn't the slightest idea what a stook was.

'Well, come on,' he said, looking us up and down again; he opened the mosquito-netted door and stepped outside.

'Here's a pair of gloves for each of you,' he began.

'Ach, I don't want gloves tae work wi',' said Will, scornfully waving the proffered gloves aside. 'I'm nae Jessie; I like tae work wi' ma bare hauns.'

'Say, I guess you ain't stocked barley before, or you wouldn't talk that way,' said the farmer. 'No man in this country works without gloves; you'd best take my advice an' look after your hands.'

'When in Rome do as Rome does,' I laughed, taking a pair of the cheap leather gloves and advising Will to do the same, which, reluctantly, he did.

Refreshed by a sound sleep and a good breakfast, the sight of the sun, now well above the horizon, the vast fields of ripened grain stretching far as the eye could see, and the cold air, which seemed curiously light and dry after a lifetime spent near the sea, all set me singing joyously within myself. I drank in the air in great gulps, expanding my chest to its limit . . . It was good air to breathe! . . . and followed Will and the farmer across a stretch of ploughed land.

'I'll set you guys stooking this barley over here first,' said our guide, 'though I guess I'd be better burnin' it; there's more sour-thistle than barley in it.'

'What is sour-thistle?' I asked.

'You see that yellow flower among the wheat there. That's sour-thistle; that, and rust, black rust and red rust, are the greatest enemies we farmers have to fight against out here.'

We came to a twenty-acre field half surrounded by clumps of scrubby willows; about half a mile beyond ran the railroad.

'Well, this is the field,' said the farmer, halting and running his eye down the lines of sheaves lying on the ground.

'I'll show you guys how to build up a stook, and then I guess I'll leave you to it.'

I watched him build up a little pyramid of sheaves. Why, of course I knew what a stook was now! This was going to be child's play; three and a half dollars a day for doing that! I felt like laughing outright.

Our employer watched us build up a stook or two, then, satisfied that we knew what to do, he said, moving away, 'I'll call you guys at twelve.'

For the first hour Will and I talked as we stooked the sheaves of barley, which were, as the farmer said, full of the yellow flowers of the sour-thistle. Taking a row each we worked across the field. The sheaves seemed to weigh nothing at all during that first hour, only one had to keep bending all the time to pick them up.

By and by the sun rose higher and the coolness of early morning gave way to a pleasant glow of heat. I stopped to straighten my back and called out, 'What time is it?'

'Ten past nine,' shouted Will.

'Surely it's later than that,' I said to myself as I resumed my task. 'Judging by the sun, it should be about eleven o'clock.' But we were getting on, we had a good few lines of stooks behind us now! Those skinny Canadians would find it a job to keep pace with us! Were those things that the farmer and that Dick fellow drove among the wheat two fields away what they called 'binders'? Lucky dogs, they had nothing to do but sit all day driving a team of horses!

The sun was still climbing. Carrying on a long monologue with myself, I continued building up stooks; the sheaves seemed quite heavy now. It grew hotter every minute; I was perspiring now; the little hard ears of barley found a way down my neck, every time I bent they scratched my stomach; several times I had to stop and pick them out. My head began to sing and I fell into a kind of daze, losing all sense of my surroundings, working mechanically, till at last the farmer called across the fields.

Thankfully we trudged back towards the house.

'Well, how did you guys get on?' asked our employer as we sat down to a mid-day meal of fried pork, with apple-sauce and potatoes, followed by apple pie and many cups of tea. Canadians, I noted, seemed to be great lovers of pickles.

We said we had made good progress.

Till our hour was up, Will and I sat outside in the shadow of the house, he smoking his pipe contentedly, while I looked out

over the plain. The clumps of grey-green willow contrasted pleasantly with the gold of ripened wheat and the black stretches of ploughed land. The sun blazed out of a brazen sky. Already my arms and neck were badly burnt.

'Come on, an' we'll get back tae they stooks o' oors,' said Will at last, knocking the ashes from his pipe and heaving himself up; Will was half a head taller than myself; a lean wiry looking figure.

All afternoon the air was filled with the humming and chirping of insects, the trilling of larks, the whirring of binders, and, at long intervals, the tolling of an engine bell as a freight train crawled painfully over a world which some ancient goddess had ironed flat in a fit of divine energy.

By the middle of the afternoon my mind was a complete blank. I was like one in a nightmare who had been given an infinitude of prairie to stook in hell. Bending my back to pick up the sheaves became the most exquisite torture. My movements lost all their early swiftness and became slow and clumsy; I staggered as I moved forward building up stook after stook. Only when lifting the water-jug to my lips for a draught of the lukewarm alkaline water was I able to straighten my back.

Slowly the sun slanted towards the west; somehow our day's work came to an end.

'Weel, that's aboot fifteen bob in oor pooches,' remarked Will, as we made for the house. 'Goad! but my back's aboot broken wi' a' that bendin' doon. I'll be glad tae get tae bed this nicht or ma name's no' Will Anderson.'

§ v

'Come on, they're all downstairs,' cried Will, roughly awakening me next morning. He was throwing his clothes on in a feverish hurry. For one sleepy moment I stared at him then, recollecting where I was, sprang out of bed, and, despite stiffness and aching limbs, dressed in record time.

By the time we had scrambled downstairs and had a hurried wash breakfast had begun.

'How do you guys feel this morning?' asked the farmer, as Will and I sat down side by side, facing him across the table.

'Oh, we're fine,' we replied in pseudo hearty voices.

We ate in an oppressive silence. It was uncomfortable; I liked lively conversation while eating; at home I had always read a book over my meals when there was no company present.

Dick and the farmer's wife had never yet addressed a word to either of us; they kept their heads bent low over their plates. It was all very puzzling. Were we the cause of the frigid silence, or had something happened before our arrival? I was at a loss what to make of this silent household.

I wondered at the stillness and silence of the world when Will and I trudged back to the field of barley, I bearing the water-jar on one shoulder. The night mists had stolen away; the sun was up and over the clump of willows which alone broke the flatness of the interminable land stretching all around and outwards to the level rim of the horizon. All the crowded life of the ship and train had vanished like a dream; we had dropped out of the world of fussy streets and shops. Something about the vast illimitable plain quietened and elevated me.

But once started stooking again I had no time for dreaming. My stiffness wore off in a little while. I kept pace with Will till the sun began blazing down, hotter than ever.

'Goad! gie us a swig o' that water,' said Will, pausing for a drink.

'My back's broken,' I groaned, when he told me it was only half-past ten.

'Come on, stick it oot, we'll get a guid rest on Sunday,' replied Will, as we resumed work; he was now stooking half a row ahead of me.

'God, I'm not going to be beaten,' I swore through clenched teeth. The ears of barley were down my neck and back again; they were even inside my gloves and down my very boots; my skin was raw where they chafed me. My clothes were soaked with perspiration; my heart thumped like a steam hammer; my neck and arms were on fire with sunburn; my

nose began to bleed; freight trains seemed to be passing up and down the railroad continually, yet when I raised my eyes from the ground to look, I saw no trains, though a bell like a locomotive warning bell tolled in my ears.

Ere twelve o'clock I was reeling on my feet, working blindly. I dragged myself back to the house. What a relief to sit for an hour! The farmer said little, but eyed us curiously. 'Anyway,' I told myself, 'we're sticking it out and neither of us is grumbling.'

The afternoon was a journey into hell. It was over ninety in the shade, according to the thermometer outside the kitchen door. I was sure the work would kill me; my heart couldn't go on thumping like that indefinitely; and there was that roaring and tolling of bells in my head, and my nose bleeding again! Will was nearly two rows ahead of me now! I was falling behind! How salt the water tasted! My handkerchief was red with blood! Anyone would think I was drunk by the way I staggered forward to build those damned stooks! Yes, I would die, and be buried thousands of miles from home; in this dreary land where there were no hills for one to lift one's eyes to! My eyes filled with tears; a great weariness and hopelessness swept over me.

'Come on, for Christ's sake get a move on,' cried Will savagely, as I stopped and pretended, swaying on my feet, to be drinking from the water-jar.

'God, I'm done,' I cried in despair, as I began again with my bloody handkerchief to my nose.

How the field was finished I never knew, but the sun was tumbling down the sky, and the binders still rattling among the wheat beside the house, when the last stook was built, and we found ourselves at the bottom of the field beside the wind-break of willow and birch.

In a bad temper, Will strode back towards the house. I staggered after him hardly able to lift one foot after another.

'The women haven't got supper ready yet,' said the farmer brusquely, coming out of the stables as we entered the yard. 'Come on, you guys, and we'll get some of this wheat stooked before they call us.'

I listened in dismay. My whole body cried out for rest; every muscle shrieked. Groaning inwardly, I followed the others. I didn't believe the farmer's words about supper not being ready, as the sun was setting and darkness was coming on.

I did my best. After the barley, the wheat was easy to stook. It was beautifully clean, without a weed, and seemed, to my inexperienced eye to be of a high grade. I was unable to keep up with the others. The farmer and Dick ran on ahead, throwing up stooks like madmen; Will was putting up a good show too.

'Put a snap in it, you,' snarled the farmer as he ran past me once. I bit back a curse. It was easy enough for him to rush about like that after sitting on a binder all day! Couldn't he see that I was doing my best!

It was dark when we stopped.

I slowly dragged one foot after the other towards the lighted kitchen. They were all seated at the table, and, as I entered, they looked up in silence.

'Oh, he's tired out,' said the grey-haired woman in a sympathetic voice. I opened my mouth but found I couldn't speak, so I gave her a faint grin as I sat down heavily.

The farmer was ominously quiet all through the meal.

§ V I

'I'm gaun tae stay here, and he can go tae hell,' groaned Will next morning to my surprise; I had thought him so much tougher than myself. I felt, when I tried to move, as if I had been flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails. Stiff and sore, we crawled out of bed and dressed ourselves. The skin on my forearms and neck had dried and cracked with the sun. It was Saturday, that was one blessing, with a day's rest to follow!

I wondered, as we went downstairs, to find breakfast half finished, how I was going to get through the day.

Not a word was uttered during the meal. I had never yet seen even the ghost of a smile on the face of the young wife.

Will and I went outside afterwards, and, filling the water-jar, waited instructions.

Coming out of the kitchen where he had lingered a moment, the farmer approached us and said shortly: 'There's a train back to Portage-la-Prairie in a coupla hours. You guys'd better pack your grips and git it.'

The heavens seemed to have crashed down about me. I gaped at the speaker. Could I have heard aright?

'You've taken two days to stook twenty acres of barley,' he went on. 'That's only five acres a day each you've been stookin', and any experienced man in this country'll do ten acres a day easy. How much do you guys reckon I owe you?' he finished, drawing a thick roll of dollar bills from his hip pocket and staring fiercely at us.

Will and I, who had listened in silence, looked at one another, and then at the farmer. There was an awkward silence, and then Will said, 'Well, we'll leave that tae yersel'.'

'Here's five dollars each,' said the farmer, stripping off a few bills and handing them to Will. 'There, that's ten dollars it's cost me to get that barley stooked . . . I guess I would have been burnin' it; it would have been cheaper,' he whined as he turned on his heel.

§ V I I

We walked along the dusty trail to the railroad depot, each with a suitcase on one shoulder, a heavy overcoat on our backs and bearing between us my cabin-trunk.

The sun beat down, and, hot and irritable, we cursed the distance from the farm to the railroad.

'Whit the bloody hell dae ye want wi' this trunk, anyway?' shouted Will as we paused for a rest. 'I'm damned if I'm gaun tae carry it a' ower Canada tae please you or onybody else.'

I had to keep control of my tongue lest he leave me to carry the trunk myself.

'Whit are ye gaun tae dae noo?' he demanded another time.

'Why, what do you intend doing?' I asked in surprise.

'I'm gaun back tae Portage-la-Prairie tae look for another farm, and I'm gaun tae take damn good care I keep the next job I get,' he answered, glowering at me.

'That's what I'm going to do myself,' I declared, glaring back.

The station consisted of a wooden hut, a small wooden platform, and a grain elevator built of galvanized iron.

A young Englishman who had sailed on the *Doric* told us, tears in his eyes, and despair in his voice, that he had been thrown off a farm that morning without any pay for the previous day's work. He had given up a job in a band to sail with the Harvesters, and now he was stranded, and had no idea what was going to happen to him.

Soon we were walking down the dusty streets of Portage-la-Prairie again. Being Saturday it was busier than ever.

The sight of so many farmers looking for men cheered us. We were sure to get another job! We had some experience behind us now and knew what the work was like! This time we would stook our ten acres a day or drop down in the attempt!

We lunched in the Chinese café, still full of Clydesiders, more blustering and blasphemous than ever. There had been a fight the night before; someone had smashed a Chinaman who had come between the combatants, through a large mirror. Some of the men in the café had spent a day on a farm and had either thrown up the work in disgust, or had been sacked; they were 'fed up' with the West already.

The Employment Bureau was a seething mass of men. Trainload after trainload of Harvesters was passing through, each one spilling some of its human content on the platform of Portage-la-Prairie's two railroad depots.

We had to fight our way into the office. The din and the heat inside were dreadful.

'You'll have to wait,' shouted the burly official at Will and I. 'All these guys here haven't had a job yet, an' they've got to get their chance first.'

For a time we sat on a bench against the wall, anxiously waiting till the crowd cleared. There were husky Canadians

and mahogany-skinned Indians among the Harvesters newly arrived from Britain. The former were being hired in preference to the inexperienced immigrants.

'Let's get tae hell oot o' this an' get some fresh air,' said Will at last. 'Look aifter the bags; I'm awa' for some tobacca,' he said when we reached the sunlit street.

Left to my own devices, I joined a group of men arguing on the sidewalk. Two big Canadians squatted in the fashion of coal-miners, with their backs against a broken-down fence and their hats tilted carelessly on the backs of their heads. Two Americans stood before them, arguing loudly about the War of Independence and 'how America won the War'. One was a youth, dressed in a shoddy blue suit, with thin sharp-pointed shoes, and a straw hat tilted back from a thin pallid face; his voice was shrill like a woman's. His companion was a tall lantern-jawed man, who upheld the honour and glory of the United States with the fervour of a religious fanatic.

'Aw, can it,' scoffed one of the Canadians. 'Say, you guys ain't squared up with the British Government yet for what you borrowed in your last war, whatya talkin' about?'

I was interested to discover that Canadians and Americans agreed with one another about as well as the Irish and English.

Just after Will returned, to find me enthralled by the picturesque language of the debaters, an old Ford rattled to a standstill, and the driver got out, shouting as he approached, 'Any of you guys lookin' for a job?'

'Sure,' chorused the young American, Will, and myself.

Ignoring us completely, the burly blue-overalled farmer addressed himself to the Canadians. 'Like a job, you fellows?' he cried, in a bluff hearty manner.

'What, stookin'?' asked one with a sneer. 'Huh, d'you think we're crazy or somethin'?' he added with a short laugh. Picking his teeth with a matchstick, he eyed the farmer up and down with studied insolence.

The newcomer directed his attention to the rest of us, running his eyes over us as if we were so much cattle for sale.

'Well, boys,' he began in a half whine, 'times are not too good with me; I'm not a rich man, and all I can offer you fellows is two and a half dollars a day for stookin'. I need three men, and if you care to come on these terms, you can have the job.'

An Irishman, a ragged fellow nearing middle-age, joined us, and, ignoring the young American, the farmer engaged Will, the Irishman and myself. 'There's only room for one in the flivver,' our new employer told us. 'You fellows can settle among yourselves who's goin' to ride back with me; the other two'll have to manage for themselves in the train. I'm sorry, boys, but it's the best I can do for you.'

Will and I said we would follow by train, and, after details about finding the farm, which lay twenty miles to the east, the farmer drove off with the Irishman.

'Say, ain't you a couple of greenhorns,' commented one of the Canadians. 'Why didn't you suck him for your railroad fares? You gotta keep your eyes skinned for these tightwad hicks from the farm. Don't let them slip anythin' across on you, boys. I guess you're new to the country an' don't know nothin' yet; but when these guys start shootin' out their mouths about bein' near to broke, an' not bein' able to pay you wages, you just grab a horse or his automobile, an' claim it as compensation.'

I asked him why he refused to stook grain.

'Say, kid,' he answered, 'that's just about the lousiest job! . . . Say, I guess I wouldn't stook for that guy for twen'y dollars a day, no sir!'

The lazy amiable Canadians seemed to find all the hustle and feverishness of their more ambitious countrymen a fit subject for Aristophanean laughter.

There being no train to our destination till early next morning, we decided to sleep in the depot.

After supper in the Chinese café we went to the C.P.R. depot and entered the waiting-hall. Harvesters lay along the seats, sleeping, or staring fixedly into space with tired, strained expressions on their faces. Finding two vacant forms, Will and I lay down. Sleep eluded me for a long time; men

bustled in and out, talking loudly, and occasionally a train hissed and clanked into the depot with loud tolling bell, causing men around me to rise and scurry out, shouting to one another as they went. My body seemed on fire with sunburn and the scratches caused by the barley.

§ VIII

About dawn, Will shook my arm and said something about going for a walk, which, in my sleep-drugged state, I failed to catch.

Opening my eyes some time later and finding myself alone I went out in search of Will. A train pulled into the C.P.R. depot, and, still half asleep, I boarded it in a sudden panic, thinking that Will had deserted me.

The sun was coming up over the horizon when I jumped down from the coach, and, as the train went on, looked about me. It was a vast and lonely world, with long lines of poplars against the morning sky.

I knocked at the door of a frame shack, and a man with tousled hair and sleepy eyes told me the way to the farm.

'It's about a mile to the south, on the right hand side of the road, I guess you won't miss it, stranger,' he said.

With my suitcase on my shoulder I set out along the dusty road; the cabin-trunk I had left behind at Portage-la-Prairie.

My thoughts were tinged with grey. What had happened to Will, and what would happen to myself? Two and a half dollars a day was a big drop in wages from the four dollars guaranteed by the C.P.R. in the pamphlet given to every Harvester when he booked his passage to Canada! How lonely the prairie was! A few wide-scattered groups of farm buildings, and nothing else but vast fields of wheat, black ploughed land, clumps of willows, long lines of poplars against the skyline, the telephone wires strung from pole to pole, the roadway, and overhead the wide empty sky, with myself the sole living creature beneath it!

§ 1 x

I arrived at the farm; a gaunt structure of two stories, with a veranda in front and black painted sheds and barn at one side. The courtyard at the rear was cluttered up with rusty ploughs and decrepit wagons, round which inquisitive chickens adventured.

'Why, say, you've come on the wrong train,' bellowed the farmer when he caught sight of me. He looked remarkably like the John Bull of cartoon fame. 'Ho, ho, ho!' he wheezed, telling his slovenly, trauchled-looking wife and numerous family about my mistake as if it was the finest joke he had heard for ages. 'Say, you'd best go to the C.N.R. depot and meet your friend,' he crowed finally. 'We didn't expect you till the nine o'clock train. Caught the wrong train! Ho! ho!'

Cursing my foolishness, I trudged to the C.N.R. railroad, about half a mile nearer the farm than the one I had come by. When I reached it I sat in the parched grass beside the gleaming metals. The sun became warm and I grew sleepy. The rails dwindled west and east into infinity. Locusts chirr-chirred, and other insects chirped and whirred and buzzed in billions, blending into one vast hum which rose into the windless air in a drowsy morning hymn. It was Sunday, and at home the bells would soon be ringing, and the townsfolk walking in their Sabbath best to Kirk! What was I doing there, sitting all alone beside a railroad track in Western Canada?

Pushing a host of dark panicky thoughts aside, I looked around. Not a human being, not a horse, a cow, a sheep, or a dog, to be seen! How vast and lonely this country was, I told myself for the hundredth time. All those hundreds of miles through Ontario; all the hundreds of miles northwards and westwards! Those ribbons of steel stretching on and on to the Rockies and the Pacific Ocean!

While my eyes rested on the heavy flanged rails, spiked down on the sleepers, instead of chaired as the rails in Britain are, I thought I detected a tremor in them. A faint rumbling came

out of the west, and a smudge of smoke appeared where the rails converged on the horizon. Watching the approach of the train was for all the world like watching a ship at home sail over the edge of the horizon. A tiny dot appeared on the skyline and slowly grew, until it resolved itself into the train I awaited. So still and silent was the prairie, that the sound of the approaching train seemed to fill the whole sky with its rumbling and clanking.

Will was the only passenger to alight.

He came towards me, burdened with his greatcoat and suitcase, his brows knitted and a black scowl on his face.

'Whit the hell did ye run awa' for?' he rasped. 'G'wan, ye're a bloody liar,' he shouted fiercely, when I tried to explain how I had rushed into the wrong train half asleep. 'I tellt ye I was only gaun for a walk. Ye only wantit tae get here afore me so that ye could suck in wi' the boss.'

'How dare you call me a liar? What do you mean?' I cried, trembling with indignation.

'Aw, shut up, or I'll gie ye a punch on the bloody mooth,' retorted Will.

We walked in a stony silence. After a little I said, 'I'll carry your case for a bit.'

'When I want your help, I'll ask for it,' snarled Will.

Bah, he's only a common lout, not worth taking notice of, I told myself. Not another word passed between us till we reached the farm.

There was a vast difference between the breakfast we sat down to that morning, and the one we had had the previous day. The farmer talked unceasingly, and laughed great belly-shaking laughs that shook the large kitchen, and got on my nerves. He had five of a family, two boys and three girls, the latter still schoolchildren. So, between his wife and children, the Irishman, and a young Canadian he had picked up on the way home the night before, and Will and I, it was a large table our new employer presided over. The food was rough and ready; bits of grizzled pork, beans, potatoes, bread and butter, with tea of a dubious flavour. The white oil-skin cloth on the table was greasy and spotted; the cooking

stove was red with rust, the floor unswept; flies buzzed everywhere.

'Well, boys, I guess you'll have to manage as best you can,' said the farmer, showing us up to the bedroom the four hired men were to share. There was but one bed. 'Ho! ho! ho! somebody'll have to sleep on the floor, I guess,' he guffawed.

'Bejasus, and I don't think much of this place,' whispered the Irishman when we were alone. 'The grub's no good at all, and it's dirty the place is.'

'Ach tae hell, whit does it maitter as long as the money's all right,' said Will. 'We can pit up wi' it for a' the time we'll be here; we're no' a lot o' Jessie-boys.'

We wandered vaguely about the yard. The farmer told us how he left England and roughed it till he owned most of the land in sight. He was mightily proud of his farm and his sons. We watched the eldest, a short sturdy youth of seventeen, climb into his flivver and drive off for the day.

'Say, there ain't a thing that boy don't know about autos and engines,' declared the burly farmer, his voice ringing with paternal pride as he watched his heir disappear in a cloud of dust. 'He can do anything, from repairing a pump to a binder. I've seen him with that flivver of his all in little bits around him one day, and drivin' away in it the next . . . Yes sir, he's a good boy; just crazy about that old flivver of his.'

Over the mid-day meal, which was a repetition of breakfast, I questioned the farmer about life in this part of Canada. He talked of the winter snows, and how the Assiniboine River, a mile or so to the south, rose in the spring thaw and flooded the prairie several inches deep.

'Wild animals? sure we got coyotes; and Jack, the eldest boy, traps muskrats in winter. Why, during the War you got as high as four dollars a skin for muskrats. Yes sir, there was some money to be picked up during the War, only you couldn't get men; the women had to go out into the fields and stook and pitch . . . and believe me, some of them could do as much as any man.'

There was an American organ in the dingy parlour, where we sat talking most of the afternoon. I was curious to learn

the state of music in this isolated place, but all the farmer said was, 'Why, say, that tuner fellow comes here and tinkers about for an hour, then charges seven dollars . . . and he gets his meals too. Say, I guess I'd've been better tuning organs and pianos than farming like I do. The way those fellows travel around . . . Living like lords . . .'

He told us how he had met the night before, three 'full-blooded Cree Indians'; old friends who had wanted to come and work through the harvest for him. 'The outlook is pretty black for me now,' I told myself. 'He doesn't need six men besides his two sons, to harvest one section of land . . . He'll try and get rid of us as sure as a gun.'

'They won't come into the house,' said the farmer when the Crees arrived. 'They're fine boys these Indians; pure breeds, aristocrats among their own people. And they're fine workers, this is the third year they've come to work for me.'

He descanted on the virtues of his Indian friends, describing the Reserve they came from, how quiet they were in their ways and how little trouble they were to have about the farm, until supper being called, we went back to the kitchen to eat our Spartan fare.

Afterwards we sat about the yard and looked at the sunset; Will had maintained a dour silence towards me all day.

When I saw the three Crees I was disappointed. Those three stolid lumps of men, heavy and lumbering in their gait, with their dusky ugly faces and lank black hair, had nothing in common with the lean, virile, half-naked Indians on horseback who had once thrilled me in the local picture-show at home.

When it grew dark we went upstairs to bed. The Crees were to sleep in the veranda. 'These boys would rather sleep under the stars than in the finest bed in Buckingham Palace,' the farmer told us. 'All they asked for was a blanket each to roll themselves in.'

The Irishman elected to sleep on the carpet. 'Bejasus, it might be safer,' he said. 'That bed might be lousy for all I know.'

When we went in to breakfast next morning, after washing in the yard in icy water from the pump, my stiffness had all gone; I was eager to begin the day's work and prove how much I had profited by the experience gained on the last farm.

There was no change in the food. Meals had become standardized on this farm! There was a hollow ring about that laugh of the farmer's! Once I caught him looking at we four white men with a peculiar expression on his face.

We were taken out to a field of cut wheat at the side of the house and left to stook it.

The Crees took one half of the field, and we four white men took the other half. We worked fast. The heat became oppressive, but my nose did not bleed as on the last farm. I stooked mechanically, telling myself that I was doing work without which our civilization could not exist, and that the farmer couldn't possibly find fault with the way we were working, as we had left his Cree friends far behind.

The morning wore on. The scorching rays of the sun had parched and cracked the earth; in the next field were patches of white, alkali-encrusted ground; the water we drank, though deliciously cool, left us with a raging thirst, so salt was it. There was a whirring and rattling in the field ahead where the farmer and his sons were reaping; the arms of the binders whirled round like miniature windmills.

When we stooked up to the wire fence at the end of the field it was a few minutes short of noon. The Crees had still a few rows to do, but we left them to finish their half of the field themselves. Will kept slyly bending up and down, pretending to be still at work. The Irishman and the young Canadian stood upright looking about them. As there was nothing else to do, I sat down behind a stook, tilted my hat over my eyes and had a rest till the farmer called us in.

A huge straw hat on his head, the farmer was standing on the kitchen steps, his burly overalled figure framed in the open doorway, when we trooped into the yard and crowded round the pump for a wash.

'Say you,' he bawled, in a hard voice.

We all looked up in surprise.

'It's you I mean,' he cried, pointing at me. 'You're fired; you can pack your things and get after you've eaten.'

'Why, what have I done?' I cried, in astonishment and dismay.

'You ain't giving satisfaction, that's all,' was the response.

In misery I sat through that meal. Several times I had to bite my trembling lip and fight back the tears that welled into my eyes.

The men were setting out to stook the field that had been cut in the morning when I brought my bag downstairs.

'Well, do you want to go off with your friend?' the farmer asked of Will in a hopeful voice.

'Naw, naw, nae fear, I'm steyin' whaur I am,' replied Will.

I watched him as he turned on his heel and followed the others through the gateway into the field. 'Yes, you blighter,' I thought bitterly, 'you're afraid I call you back and demand that ten dollars I lent you to get ashore at Quebec. But you needn't worry, I'm well rid of you at the price.'

Watching me as if I was a suspicious character, the farmer shadowed me round the side of the house and stood in front of his veranda till I was well down the road.

I laughed bitterly as I walked along with my bag on my shoulder. Not a week in Canada, and here I was, alone . . . All that talk of sticking together! . . . Pure hot air! Well, it was just fate. It wasn't the fault of Owen and Ralph that we had split up in the first place, and I couldn't blame Will for looking to his own skin first; I could only blame myself for imagining that life could be ever anything else but a case of each man for himself!

'Goin' to the depot, stranger?' the driver of a Ford truck said as he stopped beside me. 'Throw your grip in the back and jump up here.'

The brown-skinned overalled driver chatted affably all the way to the depot, but I was too preoccupied with gloomy forebodings to take much notice of what he said.

CHAPTER IV

§ I

I SAT on the bench running round the hut which represented the railroad depot. I found it difficult to grasp the reality of my position; it reminded me too much of the horrible nightmares which had terrorized my childhood. Desperately I strove to remain calm; I determined to return to Portage-la-Prairie and try still another farm. What else was there to do in Canada? I asked myself, staring wildly out at the monotonous plain shimmering in the heat. There was no question of my running back to Winnipeg, admitting defeat to the Reimers and asking them to assist me, and what was the good of seeking out Ralph and Owen? They might have wandered from farm to farm as Will and I had done; they might be anywhere by this time!

The big cannon ball stove in the centre of the hut set me thinking of the winter, only a few weeks away. My imagination painted a picture of myself starving to death in a desolate snow-covered prairie, which was so vivid that I rushed out of the hut in terror and made for the store a short distance away.

The action calmed me a little, and entering the store, I bought some biscuits, more for the sake of talking to someone than satisfying my hunger.

'There are lots of other farmers around that'll be needin' help,' said the storekeeper, when I told him my tale of woe. 'Why don't you ask some of them if they'll take you on?'

Such was my dreamy introvert nature that I was surprised by the obviousness of the question.

'We've all got to rough it at first, and get lots of hard knocks until we learn the ropes,' he went on. 'Oh, I guess it's pretty hard for the tenderfoot at first; I was pretty green myself when I came out West, so I know what I'm talking about. But a decent young fellow'll soon find his feet. You'll be all right, son, don't you get worrying.'

We went out on the veranda and stood looking over the sunlit plain. Vast masses of cumulus cloud reared themselves over the poplar-lined horizon. In the foreground, a man was ploughing with a Fordson tractor.

'There's Jake there, he might be looking for a man,' said the storekeeper. He shouted to the blue-overalled driver as the tractor rattled and roared to a standstill at the end of the field.

Jake, who had a pleasant intelligent face, said that he was sorry, but his grain was all stooked. We talked for a while, leaning on the wire fence. Both men were greedy for news of conditions in the Old Country. A chance remark of mine about music made them prick up their ears. 'Say, Jake, a pianist in town,' cried the storekeeper. 'I guess we'd best ring up the neighbours and throw a party; make a night of it, eh?'

I was in too despondent a mood to think of parties, so excused myself, saying that I was waiting for the first train to Portage-la-Prairie.

On the way back to the railroad hut I saw, in a field running parallel to the track, a tall thin man stooking wheat with the aid of a pitchfork. The storekeeper had said he was a Welshman. I vaulted the wire fence. The tall thin man stopped working, and, leaning on his pitchfork, watched my approach.

He stared at me with wide-open pale blue eyes which seemed to mirror the loneliness of the plain around us, and listened to my plea for work.

'No, I don't need help,' he shook his head from side to side, speaking in a voice which sounded rusty from disuse.

I attempted to engage him in conversation, but his staring eyes unnerved me, and I hurried back to the hut. All the stories of men and women going mad with the loneliness of the prairie told me by aunts who had spent six years in Western Canada, came back to me.

I lay along the bench and began reviewing my situation again. A few dollars in my pocket and forty in the bank at Winnipeg! How long would that last? It wouldn't take me back to Scotland; and even if I did write for my passage money home, how could I ever hold up my head again in the little

town I had been born in? What use was I in this world? I had no specialized training, no profession behind me, and now it seemed that I wasn't even fitted for manual labour? Oh God! I groaned aloud, and clutching my hair, rocked my head from side to side in utter despair.

Now and then I shook myself in an attempt to throw off the morbid thoughts which had taken possession of me, and going to the door, looked up and down the track for signs of an approaching train. There was nothing in the flat plain to distract my thoughts; the hum of insects and the whirring of distant binders only emphasized the awful silence. For the first time in my life I was alone in the real sense of the word. Despite my struggles to restrain them, tears streamed down my cheeks. How was I to live if no-one would employ me? What use was my education in a country where brute strength and the staying powers of a robot were the sole qualifications demanded by ruthless employers?

For hours, in a midnight of despair, I sat in that hut. The west was aflame with the setting sun when a train rumbled out of the east.

§ 11

Reaching Portage-la-Prairie, I entered an hotel in Main Street and asked the tall cynical clerk in the dingy entrance hall if I could have a room for the night.

Without a word the fellow handed me a key and thrust the visitors' book and a pen before me. When I asked if I could have some supper, he gave me a cold stare, removed a cigar from his mouth, spat into a sawdust-filled box, and, turning his back on me, made for a doorway. The sound of voices and the click of billiard balls floated out as he opened the door and disappeared.

Trembling with indignation I went upstairs, found my room, and, tired and hungry, went to bed. Never in all my experience of inns and hotels had I been received like this!

For a time I lay thinking, before I fell asleep, of all the little

hotels in Scotland I had slept in on motor-cycle tours; of portly landlords beaming welcomes and crying heartily, 'Step richt in, sir, ye must be tired aifter your lang journey. And what will ye be wantin' tae your supper, sir? I've got a nice bit o' . . .'

§ 111

When I awoke it was broad daylight. Rising and dressing quickly I made my way downstairs in search of a meal. The churlish clerk of the night before sneered, then snapped out that I would require to wait till mid-day if I wanted anything to eat. In high dudgeon I paid my bill and secured my belongings.

Going along Main Street to the Chinese café, I cried to the boy behind the counter when I entered. 'Say, can I have something to eat?'

'Sure, wha' you wan?'' the Chinaman grinned.

'Thank God I've met a civil being at last,' I breathed.

The alacrity and cheerfulness with which the Chinaman attended to my wants set me thinking.

In sensational novels and on the screen, Chinamen had always been cunning, slant-eyed little devils, always up to some mischief, trying to wipe the white race out of existence, or abducting some colonel's ravishingly beautiful daughter, so it struck me as remarkable that they should grin cheerfully, talk about the state of business in Portage-la-Prairie, and altogether act the jovial host, while the people in the hotel I had left were so boorish and utterly indifferent to my needs.

Paying my score, I walked along to the Employment Bureau.

With a more critical eye I looked at the dilapidated shacks, the more pretentious three- and four-storied brick buildings, the two shabby little picture-shows, the 'Amusement-parlours', shady-looking dives with gaudy frescoed exteriors and questionable characters idling beside penny-in-the-slot machines and rifle ranges; I couldn't picture myself spending the rest of my life in such shabby, brutally practical surroundings.

The narrow passageway leading to the Employment

Bureau, and the little office itself, were packed with excited Harvesters. Among the immigrants were Canadians from the Eastern Provinces.

As I forced my way towards the counter a long lanky fellow caught my arm. 'Look here, Jock,' he cried, 'you're no' tae tak' a job at less than fower dollars a day; d'ye hear?' The speaker's one eye was alight with fierce Marxian fires. 'Us yins have got tae haud thegither an' stick up for oor richts, noo that they've got us stranded in this bloody desert.'

'Aye that's richt, we've got tae haud thegither an' see that naebody works for less than fower dollars a day,' growled the men around me.

'No, I've got no intention of working for less than four dollars a day,' I humoured them, though prepared at that moment to work for little more than my keep.

The ragged Scots Communists kept bombarding the burley Employment official with questions and threats.

'I tell you, boys, I've got nothing to do with it,' he kept shouting as the C.P.R. leaflets, bearing, in black and white, the promise of work at four dollars a day, were thrust into his face. 'I don't fix the wages . . . I've got nothing to do with these agreements; I'm employed by the Dominion Government, not the C.P.R. All I can do is put you boys in touch with farmers who are looking for men; the wage is a private agreement between the farmer and the hired man.'

Wondering what was going to happen, I hung about the office. On comparing notes with my fellow immigrants I found that quite half of them had been on farms and had had experiences similar to my own. Others, as they had stubbornly refused to work for less than the four dollars guaranteed, had never been out of Portage-la-Prairie. The men around me had no money and were hungry, already some were murmuring wildly about looting the shops in Main Street — no idle talk, I knew, having seen Glasgow in 1919 like an armed camp, with tanks in George Square, steel-helmeted troops marching up Renfield Street with Lewis guns, and sentries guarding railway bridges, all because of these same Communists.

Farmers kept coming into the office. With unconcealed

contempt they eyed the men from the Old Country up and down. 'No sir, I've had enough of these Old Country bums,' I overheard one say to the clerk. The Indians and Canadians from the Eastern Provinces were snapped up. Over the 'phone it was the same story. 'Don't send us any more of these Old Country fellows, send us experienced men.'

'Say, can you tell me what it's all about?' pleaded a young newspaper man from Winnipeg. He had been questioning the others but the Scots dialect was a foreign language to him. Thinking that the Canadian Press had better know the facts of our position, I told him about the C.P.R.'s Harvesting scheme, and gave a brief account of my experience on the two farms. Closing his shorthand book with a snap, the reporter rushed off, shouting his thanks over his shoulder.

'Hi, boys,' cried the lanky one-eyed Communist, 'we'll hae tae dae something aboot this, some o' the boys have had naethin' tae eat a' day. We're no' gaun tae lie doon an' stairve tae please a lot o' bloody Capitalists . . . We've been brocht oot here under fa'se pretences . . . They promised us work at fower dollars a day, an' here's the agreement in black an' white.'

The fierce expressions on the faces around me set my blood racing. I was glad I had returned to Portage-la-Prairie!

'Come on, boys, we'll get up a deputation an' ask the heid man o' the toon whit he's gaun tae dae aboot us; we're no' gaun tae stairve onyway,' shouted One-Eye. 'We want tae get wan or twa men that hae been on fairms already an' can talk about the wey they were treated.'

'Aye, aye, get up a deputation,' chorused everybody.

I was seized by the arms and led before One-eye.

'Tell us a' aboot it,' commanded that disciple of Lenin.

For the second time that afternoon I related my experiences.

'And ye never got the wages ye were promised?' cried One-Eye, seizing on the points of my story which he thought would tell. 'Will ye come wi' us tae see the Mayor o' the toon?' he asked, in tones which brooked no refusal.

The Mayor, a smart business-like man, kept a hardware store in Main Street. When the deputation trooped into his shop he came forward and listened attentively to One-Eye's impassioned recital of our grievances. He was very quiet and sympathetic, and, asking a few questions, seemed satisfied with the replies he received.

An assistant called him to the 'phone. During his absence a farmer, a scarecrow of a man with a scraggy neck and salt and pepper walrus moustache, asked me which part of the Old Country I hailed from. 'Ayrshire,' he echoed, in a thin piping voice. 'Say, I hired a man, just come from Ayrshire, and I guess he's the best man I ever seen with a plough in all my born days . . . Yes, sir; say, he ploughs a furrow as straight as you'd drawed it with a ruler. I guess I got no complaints to make about the men from the Old Country, no sir.'

'All right, boys,' said the Mayor on his return. 'You get back to the Employment Office and wait there till you hear from me; I'll do all I can. Meantime, I'll see what I can do about fixing you up with a meal.'

When One-Eye bellowed out the Mayor's message to the men who had remained in the Employment Office, the street rang with the prolonged cheering.

'None o' us hae got a brass farthin',' an ex-riveter from Clydebank told me. Ye would haurdly believe it,' he went on vehemently, 'but three o' the fellahs hadnae had a bit tae eat for twa days, an' dae ye ken that big Chinaman's café doon the street there? . . . Aye, weel, when Johnnie Chinaman in there heard some o' the boys talkin' aboot them, dae ye ken what he did? . . . He sent oot for them an' had them brocht in, an' gied them a square meal. Noo,' the indignant narrator demanded of me, 'ye could haurdly credit that . . . Tae think that a Chinaman wid dae that for them, an' their ain kind wid let them walk about the streets till they drapped doon deid wi' hunger! . . . An' they talk about Christianity! . . . Christians! Ach!' the speaker spat on the floor with disgust.

There was a sudden hush in the crowded office as the burly official shouted. 'That's a 'phone message from the Mayor. He says that the ladies of the town have got together and arranged a meal for you all at one of the hotels.'

'Hurrah,' roared the hungry men.

Then the Inspector of Police arrived to say that we could have the Court-house to sleep in; then, telling us to follow him, led us to the hotel — a plain unpretentious, place well down Main Street near the Court-house.

We crowded into and filled the dining-room. I sat beside two young Englishmen who had been members of the deputation; quiet reserved fellows, dressed like myself, in khaki breeches, open-necked shirts, and tweed jackets.

The Communists were vastly entertaining to watch. As the meal progressed, their airs and graces became more and more lordly. Lolling back in their seats they behaved like true Socialists, bawling at the harassed waiters and giving unnecessary orders for the pleasure of watching others run at their bidding. 'Waitah! waitah!' I heard One-Eye call, mimicking the mincing accents of suburban Glasgow. 'Bring me a glass of wattah.' 'Haw! haw!' guffawed his companions, when the waiter went off muttering curses. 'That's the wey tae dae it, boys,' cried One-Eye with a knowing wag of his head.

§ v

In the dusk we straggled down Main Street, One-Eye and the Inspector leading the way.

The excitement of the day, the uncertainty of my position, and the mental torment inflicted by my too fertile imagination had left me limp and dispirited.

'Here you are, boys,' cried the Inspector as we crowded noisily into the Court-room, 'you can make yourselves comfortable as you can on these forms.'

Everyone began talking at once and making a great noise as they dragged forms out into the middle of the floor. I

kept close to the two English fellows, lay down on a form, and closed my tired eyes.

'The Mayor's in touch with the Immigration authorities in Winnipeg,' I heard the Inspector's deep voice boom above the buzz of talk, so I opened my eyes again and sat up.

Emerging from an office, the Mayor held up his hand for silence, then began speaking. 'I've just been in communication with the Immigration people in Winnipeg, boys,' he began. 'They say that they are not responsible for bringing you out to this country. If the farmers won't hire you they say they can do nothing for you at all . . . The C.P.R. organized this scheme, they tell me, and all the responsibility rests on their shoulders.'

An angry muttering broke out among the Clydesiders.

When the Inspector came out of the office and whispered in his ear, the Mayor called out, 'That's the C.P.R. on the 'phone now, boys. We're doing everything in our power to help you.'

When the Mayor disappeared into the office again there was a sudden uproar as everybody started voicing their indignation and fears at the top of their voices. I sat looking on, with an occasional grin at the two English fellows.

'We've been brocht oot under fa'se pretences,' roared One-Eye, loudest of all. 'It's a game o' the Capitalists tae get rid o' us.'

His ragged companions broke into bitter denunciations of all Capitalistic governments, and, 'We'll bloody well fight for oor richts and mak' somebody suffer for bringing us oot here tae stairve,' arose on all sides.

It was all an incomprehensible tangle to me, with terrifying possibilities. I forced myself to smile, remembering that I was a Stoic, and told myself it was dashed funny how we had believed all the fairy-tales we had been told about Canada.

'Well, boys,' said the Mayor at last. 'I've been speaking to the C.P.R. headquarters in Winnipeg. I've explained the whole situation, and the best they can do for you, is to offer you extra-gang work at Mactavish. It's rough unskilled labour, but, if you care to accept it, the work's there for you.'

'Whit's the pey?' demanded One-Eye in a stentorian voice charged with suspicion.

'Well,' replied the Mayor, 'they offer thirty cents an hour for a ten-hour day, and six dollars a week are deducted for board.'

'Naw! naw!' bellowed the Clydesiders in chorus. 'We want the fower dollars a day we were promised; that was the agreement; we've got it doon in black an' white.'

'We're no' gaun tae work for less than fower dollars a day,' shouted One-Eye above the rest. 'D'ye hear, youse guys?' he cried fiercely to the handful of men, of which I was one, who told the Mayor they were prepared to take any work offered them.

I admired the diplomatic way the Mayor and Inspector handled the crisis and finally persuaded the Communists to accept the work at the terms offered. From snatches of low-voiced talk which reached my ears I gathered that the Clydesiders had no intention of working for the C.P.R. but that Winnipeg was their objective.

'All right then, boys,' said the Inspector when things had quietened down, 'get your grips and follow me.'

Though it was only eleven o'clock at night, the streets of Portage-la-Prairie were empty and silent as the grave.

I walked beside the two Englishmen and a swarthy, sturdily built Scot from Govan, whose remarks about the Communists 'only being out to make trouble for everybody', made me look on him as an ally of peace and order. Being weary, I was grateful when he helped me to carry my cabin-trunk into the coach which stood waiting in a siding at the C.P.R. depot.

I was too sleepy to remember much more beyond tumbling down on a seat, then, later, being jolted out of my sleep for a moment when we were coupled to a train and borne away into the night.

§ V I

I blinked blankly round the coach, and as I groped in the mists of sleep, the doings of the previous day returned. The motionless coach was full of recumbent figures who moved restlessly in a sleep of exhaustion. The sound of whispering

and furtive movements behind me caused me to turn. Two ragged Communists were standing at the closed door. I raised the window blind and looked out. All I could distinguish in the grey dawn-light was a wide network of railroad metals criss-crossing and reaching to the sharp-angled outlines of large many-storied warehouses.

'Where are we?' I whispered to the men at the door.

'Winnipeg,' one of them hissed back. 'We're tryin' tae get oot an' dae a bunk, but a' the doors is locked.'

'There's wan o' they mountit polismen on guard tae see that we dinnae escape,' said his companion bitterly. 'We're bloody prisoners, that's what we are! They're feart we get oot an' expose the hale damn lot o' them for bringin' us oot tae Canada under fa'se pretences, that's whit the game is.'

Too sleepy to care whether I was a prisoner or not, I lay down, again and fell asleep immediately.

CHAPTER V

§ 1

THROUGH the now open doorway the sun streamed into the coach. The recumbent Harvesters were stirring when I went to the door and looked out. The sun had just topped the galvanized iron roof of a small grain elevator beside which stood a house; chickens pecked about under freight cars standing in a siding; farther down was a line of shabby box-cars; the main line running past them, stretched straight as an arrow to the horizon. Tiny figures in blue overalls moved about in front of the box-cars, wide-brimmed straw hats on their heads. The name Mactavish was painted in neat white letters on a board on the single platform across the way. There was a hut, a small stockyard with white painted fences, and, across the deep-rutted earthen roadway, a single store with a balcony in front. The rest was nothing but yellow grain, stooked or still uncut, with every mile or so, a cluster of farm buildings sheltered by clumps of trees.

'Hey,' roared One-Eye indignantly when he looked out. 'Whaur the hell's this they've brocht us tae? Whaur's the bloody toon? Look, boys, there's no' a hoose tae be seen.'

A chorus of oaths arose as the minutes passed and no-one came near us. 'Whaur's the grub we were promised?' demanded the Communists savagely of one another. 'Whit a Goad-forsaken hole tae be stranded in.'

The thin high-pitched sound of someone hammering metal reached my ears; the men in front of the old box-cars suddenly swarmed together and disappeared. Must have been the breakfast gong, lucky devils!

After an agonizing delay a huge portly figure waddled towards us from the line of old box-cars.

The newcomer stopped and stared up at us. He wore an enormous straw hat like an old-fashioned sun-bonnet. The

blue of his shirt and overalls matched the blue of the bright eyes that twinkled in a face like that of a great chubby, rosy-cheeked schoolboy.

'You fellah gonna work here?' he demanded, in an abrupt tenor voice which had a French burr.

'Hey, whit about giein' us some breakfast?' cried One-Eye truculently, 'we're a' starvin'.'

'Aw right, you fellah, aw right,' replied the portly stranger, silencing One-Eye with a wave of his hand. 'You fellah wantta work here on extra-gang?' he asked the whole company.

'Aye,' shouted a voice, 'if ye pay us fower dollars a day.' One-Eye glared at the speaker and snarled in an undertone.

'You shut yer bloody mooth or we'll get naethin' tae eat.'

'Sure we'll work for ye,' he said aloud. 'But ye'll hae tae gie us oor breakfast first . . . We cannae work on an empty stomach.'

'Aw right, you fellah, if you goin' to stay an' work you can get breakfast in leetle while . . . when I call.'

'Sure boy, we'll work like hell,' cried One-Eye. 'I don't bloody-well think,' he added *sotto voce*.

'Aw right, you get breakfast in leetle while . . . when I call,' repeated the portly Boss, waddling off.

§ 11

With a whoop of joy, the Harvesters raced for the line of box-cars, where, at last, the portly figure of the Boss had appeared, calling and waving his arms.

There ensued a wild scrum round the door of a box-car fitted up as a dining-car. Presently I found myself seated near one end of the long table which ran down the middle of the car; beside me was the quiet Scot who had helped me with my cabin-trunk the night before. Helpings of sausage and mashed potatoes on blue-enamelled tin plates were passed up the table, handed in from the adjoining cook-car.

With a clattering of knives and forks and a gabbling of voices, every one fell to eating.

The table, covered with a white oilcloth, was spread with a profusion of eatables; plates piled high with cold sausage, dishes of stewed prunes and apples, tins of various kinds of jam, new-made bread in little square cakes, and water-biscuits by the pound, and to wash this down, big tin pitchers of steaming coffee.

'Now you fellah,' cried our French-Canadian Boss when we had breakfasted. 'Each man take a shovel an' get on hand-car queeck.'

Like children with a new toy, the Clydeside Reds leaped on the hand-cars. They had a trial run up and down, in front of the cabooses, clattering along at a mad speed, yelling with delight.

The French-Canadian Boss on the first hand-car with a dozen others; Ned, the two English chums, and myself, among those on the second car, and One-Eye and his comrades in the rear, we set off northwards.

Their hunger appeased, the Reds treated the whole business as a joke. When I saw One-Eye's car fall behind I thought they intended turning back and refusing to work, but, as I watched, I saw the distant figures heaving rapidly up and down.

Yelling like Dervishes, they charged down on us, creating a sudden panic on my car. 'Hi, hi! stop! . . . Whit's the bloody game? . . . They'll hae us a' killt,' shouted alarmed voices. We bent our backs and put on speed to lessen the shock of the coming impact, and bumped into the French-Canadian's car. With an appalling clatter One-Eye's car charged into us, almost spilling the entire gang over the permanent way.

'Hi, whasamatter you fellah,' shouted the irate boss above the general confusion.

'Haw! haw!' guffawed the Reds. 'Come on, boys,' shouted One-Eye gleefully, 'we'll dae it again.'

For about four miles, until we came to where a gang were working on the track, the Reds kept falling behind and charging down on us, and the more alarmed and angry everyone became, the louder they laughed.

When I helped to lift my hand-car from the rails and place

it on the parched grass at the side of the track, I was apprehensive of the nature of the work before me. This was my third job in one week! 'If I lose this job, God knows what will happen to me,' I said to Ned, the quiet Scot, as I picked up a shovel.

'Ach, ye don't need tae worry,' he said cheerfully. 'Keep close tae me. I can tell by the look o' ye that ye're no' used tae labourin' . . . Ye've juist got tae tak' it easy an' keep movin' a' the time . . . don't get knockin' yer pan oot in the first two hoors, tryin' tae show hoo much ye can dae, an' ye'll dae fine . . . Ye've got a fine pair o' shoulders on ye, onywey.'

The French-Canadian told us to load flat-cars with gravel, which had been newly dumped at the side of the track, and push them along to where the rest of the gang were working and unload them there.

I was going to work like a nigger and take damn good care I didn't get the sack this time!

'Tak' it easy, man, tak' it easy,' said Ned in my ear, as, goaded by the fear of finding myself jobless again, I began heaving great shovelfuls of gravel at top speed. I steadied myself and worked at an easier pace.

When we pushed the first load of gravel towards the gang working on the track, I thought I had never seen such villainous looking foreigners. I wondered what their nationalities were, as, with unsmiling faces they stared at us whenever we drew near. They were of all sizes and ages . . . big men of splendid physique . . . little wizened creatures, gnarled and twisted by a lifetime of arduous labour. Their clothes were few and ragged and patched; some of them wore nothing but a suit of tattered overalls, a shirt, and a pair of heavy boots on their feet, with wide-brimmed straw hats like the Boss's protecting their heads from the fierce sun. With the exception of the young boys, they had huge moustaches, twisted into fierce points or drooping heavily.

Out of a corner of my eye I watched a group of them lifting the rails and sleepers, using big jacks. The men 'Yo-heaved' in a sing-song way as they exerted all their strength on the long iron crowbar which operated the jacks. The remainder of the

gang packed the gravel under the sleepers thus raised, to keep them at their new level, stamping it down vigorously with one foot or their shovels.

Now and then One-Eye and his comrades threw aside all pretence of working and careered up and down on the hand-cars yelling and shouting at every one to get out of the way.

'Ach,' snorted Ned disgustedly, after leaping for safety once. 'It was the same in the shipyards at hame . . . It's men like them that spoils everything for the fellah that wants tae work . . . They'll neither work nor want, that crowd . . . I ken whit I wid dae wi' them . . . Ship the whole damn lot o' them oot tae the Moscow they're aye creatin' such a noise about . . . That wid bring them tae their senses.'

I noticed how the Reds, resting their finger-tips on the end of the loaded flat-cars, while grunting and groaning and making a great show of straining every muscle of their bodies, let the men like Ned do all the work. 'Aw, that's an auld game,' said Ned, when I drew his attention to this fact.

When Charlie, the French-Canadian, lifted up his voice at noon in a long drawn 'All aboo-ard', shovels were thrown aside, and, as the hand-cars could only carry half the gang, there was a wild scurry. Among those left behind, I sat down on the track and awaited the return of the hand-cars, too hungry and tired to take any interest in anything.

'Feel a bit better noo?' laughed Ned, as, after a long delay we finished our mid-day meal.

'I feel fine now,' I grinned. 'More like a human being. I was so weak with hunger, out on the track there, that I could hardly stand on my feet . . . I can't understand it; I never felt like that at home.'

'Ach, it's juist the chainge o' air and the work,' laughed Ned as we rose and made for the hand-cars.

§ 111

That afternoon, with the passing of every hour the sun seemed to grow hotter. Sweating in every pore I worked in

a blind mechanical way; the glare from the white gravel hurt my eyes and gave me a headache.

One of the foreign boys walked up and down, bearing a pail of water and little metal drinking cups, and 'Waterboy', 'Waterboy' was the continual cry which rose above the clinking of shovels, the 'Yo-heaving' of the jackmen, and the whirring of unseen legions of prairie insects.

'Oh Goad,' groaned a little battered-looking Communist, catching my eye as he raised a brimming cup of tepid water to his lips. 'Whit could I no dae tae a gless o' beer the noo?'

Thankful that I had been able to struggle through the long day without collapsing, I hauled myself painfully on board the last hand-car. I longed to lay my head somewhere and sleep away my mental and physical weariness.

I was not surprised when One-Eye began haranguing us after supper.

'Noo, look here, youze guys,' he began, speaking from the doorway of the coach we had come in. 'There's naebody tae stey on this gang an' work for less than fower dollars a day.'

A growl of assent rose from his supporters.

'We were promised fower dollars a day. They tellt us that before we sailed, an' here's the guarantee printit in black an' white.' One-Eye's voice rose in a shrill crescendo as he waved the C.P.R. handbill triumphantly in the air. 'We came oot here tae this damnt desert . . . And whit dae we find? . . . We find that it's a' a lot o' bloody bosh! . . . A game tae flood the labour market an' bring doon wages. They've brocht us oot here intae this Goad-forsaken hole tae flood the labour market! . . . They want us tae work like a lot o' bloody slaves among a' they foreigners doon there . . . The same foreigners that the Capitalists had us fightin' in the War!'

Supported by the cheers of his comrades, One-Eye worked himself into a Marxian frenzy.

'We're bein' exploitit by the bloody Capitalists, that's a' it is . . . An' oor ain Government at hame has had a haun in it tae! . . . They've brocht us oot here tae get rid o' us, because they thocht we were too dangerous for them . . . because we ken a' aboot them noo, an' they can see whit happened tae

their like in Russia! . . . We focht the Capitalists' War for them, an' whit hae we got oot o' it? . . . This is whit they dae tae us . . . Leave us strandit in the prairie that's only fit for the bloody Indians an' they foreigners that don't ken ony better . . . But, by Christ,' yelled One-Eye reaching his climax, 'nae Capitalist's gaun tae mak' a slave o' me, an' hae me workin' a sixty hoor week for twelve dollars.'

All, save a small group standing apart, received One-Eye's speech with acclamation. We'll a' go back tae Winnipeg an' demand oor richts,' cried the Reds. 'We've a' been soldiers an' ken a' aboot rifles an' bayonets . . . Aye, too true we dae, we focht the Capitalists' War for them . . . Goad help them that tries tae stop us.'

My part was that of an interested onlooker. It was only another variation of a theme made familiar by the rantings of tub-thumping agitators at street corners at home, and long heated arguments with the younger of my father's workmen. Communism had swept over Scotland with all the force of a new religion. The minds of the young pleasure-hungry working-classes had been filled with visions of a heaven on earth; of a world purged of Capitalists, want, care, and toil, where in some miraculous way the working-man was to reign supreme and live happy ever after.

I could see plainly that shipping the discontented population of Britain to the Colonies solved no social problems. One-Eye and his comrades had brought to Canada their social grievances and extremist politics as well as their personal belongings, and it looked as if Glasgow's troubles were now going to be Winnipeg's.

§ 1 v

'If you fellah going to stay and work on extra-gang,' said Charlie, waddling up, 'you berrer come down and find bunks in sleeping-car.'

'Are you going to stay and work here?' I asked Ned, chilled by a sudden fear that I was going to be left alone among the foreigners.

'Too true I am,' he replied promptly. 'D'ye tak' me for one o' they Bolshies? Naw, naw, I'm no' wan o' they fellahs that's juist oot tae smash things . . . It's a joab I'm lookin' for, nae maitter whit kind . . . I'm steysin' here, even if it is only navvyin', until I get a chance o' daein' somethin' better!'

Followed by half the Harvesters, we removed our belongings from the coach and made for the old box-cars. Half a dozen of us clambered into the first sleeping car we came to.

I was a little scared of the foreigners, who sat on bunks, talking and patching clothes; their heads had been cropped like convicts, and, with their hats off, they looked more ferocious than ever.

It was dark inside the car, the only light being that which shone through the doorway and the tiny window at either end, and, as I secured a vacant bunk near the door, I felt uneasy.

'Hey boys,' came a voice from the dimness, 'we cannae sleep on bare boards; we'll hae tae see aboot this.' The speaker went off, reappearing after a long interval with an armful of straw. 'Well,' I said, as I tugged off my heavy topboots, 'this is roughing it with a vengeance. By Jove, if the hockey club fellows could only see me now!'

Fully dressed, I lay down, and, with my topboots as a pillow, and my coat for a blanket, I fell asleep.

§ v

A rough hand shook me out of a sound sleep. I opened my eyes to find the box-car inky black. A wave of terror swept over me. Were the foreigners going to murder me? My heart thumped wildly; had I not been temporarily paralysed I would have screamed out. Then, as I expected to feel a knife being plunged into my body, a voice hissed in my ear, 'Come on, Jock, get up . . . we're a' gaun tae dae a bunk afore the bloody Bolshevicks cut a' oor throats . . . The boys is gaun back tae Winnipeg tae demand the fower dollars a day we were promised.'

'What?' I shouted, furious at being needlessly scared.

'Come on, Jock, get up,' repeated the voice in a hoarse undertone. 'The Harvesters are a' awa' back tae the coach we came in. There's a train takin' it back tae Winnipeg the night.'

'To hell with you and your four dollars a day; get out, I want to sleep.' My nerves in rags, I pushed the unseen man away.

'Aw richt, ye can stey there an' be damned,' said the hoarse voice. There was a scraping of a boot near the doorway, followed by the thud of a man landing on the track, then dead silence.

My sleep was shattered once again. The box-car swayed and heaved beneath me; the night was filled with an appalling clattering. My sleep fuddled brain had only time to note that dawn was at hand, and that somewhere a locomotive was puffing and tolling, when there came a rapid clattering crescendo and again the car leaped and swayed. Amid the confusion, a pail of icy water fell from the table at the foot of my bunk and completely soused me. 'Hey,' I roared at the top of my voice, 'what's the game?'

A chorus of angry voices and a row of scowling shaven heads peering at me from the bunks down the opposite side of the car reminded me that I had allowed the Harvesters to steal away without me. Shivering with cold and fear I lay in my wet bunk awaiting daylight.

§ v i

Stiff and heavy-eyed, I drew on my topboots and hurried past the Bohunks into the sunlight. Where were the Harvesters? I heaved a sigh of relief. The passenger coach was still there, and what was better, Ned and the two English chums were sitting with half a dozen others on the metals in front of the dining-car.

'Where are the others?' I asked Ned.

'Och them,' he replied disgustedly. 'They're up the line there in the coach, an' I hope tae Goad they stey there . . .

Let them go back tae Winnipeg, it wud be a damn guid riddance. I've had enough o' that crowd . . . Juist oot tae mak' trouble . . . Ye wud be gettin' on fine at the shipyards at hame, workin' steady, gettin' guid money, when some o' they agitators wud stairt shootin' oot their necks for mair money, an' then, before ye knew whaur ye were there was a strike on, an' ye were oot in the streets again.'

'You fellah goin' to stay an' work?' Charlie asked us after breakfast.

'Of coorse we're gaun tae work,' answered Ned indignantly. 'Whit dae ye think we came here for?'

'Aw right you fellah, get on hand-car,' replied Charlie.

While the eleven Harvesters who had elected to remain on the gang were lifting the last hand-car on to the track and preparing to follow Charlie and the Bohunks, the Communists, headed by One-Eye, came down from the coach, driven by hunger towards the dining-car.

'Hey,' bawled One-Eye, as we began to move off, 'whaur dae youze guys think yer gaun? Get off that hand-caur!'

'We're gaun tae work,' shouted Ned.

'Ye're whit?' shrieked One-Eye, his voice rising an incredulous octave. 'Dae ye mean tae say youze guys are gaun tae stey here an' work for less than fower dollars a day?'

'Rush the bloody scabs,' shouted a voice; at once the mob were galvanized into action. Booing and uttering wild threats they charged towards us, picking up stones and throwing them as they ran.

'Gwan you bloody bahrstards,' jeered a Cockney, as we heaved on the handles of the car and sent it bounding out of range.

I found myself laughing, my whole body tingling with excitement and elation. It was queer, I reflected, as the line of shabby box-cars dropped below the horizon, how one could laugh at danger in broad daylight, yet cower at imaginary dangers in the darkness of the night.

When we returned for our mid-day meal I was thankful to find that the Communists had gone. Wielding a shovel for five hours had taken all the fight out of me.

In the afternoon Charlie set us 'tamping ties', that is stamping gravel with shovels under railway sleepers which have been jacked up several inches. Each tie required eight men to 'tamp', four on each side. I found myself working opposite a little foreigner whose body was gnarled and twisted by manual labour.

When I smiled, I discovered how foolish my fears of the foreigners had been, for, beaming all over his brown weather-beaten face, the man facing me said in the friendliest of broken English, 'You only come now to Canada, yes?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'What country do you come from?'

'Me Polack,' the little man said proudly.

'You like Canada?'

'Oh, Canada good,' he admitted grudgingly, 'but my countree better, oh! moch better.'

'Does wheat grow like that in your country?' I asked, pointing to the field of uncut wheat on the other side of the fence.

'Oh,' said the Pole with childlike eagerness. 'In my countree wheat grow . . . high like this.' He held his hand above his shoulder. 'Not like wheat in Canada,' he said, making a face at the knee-high grain over the fence.

My interest and the simple questions I asked seemed to please the little Pole. My passion for pianoforte playing had long since endeared me to the race who had produced a Chopin, a Paderewski, and a Leschetizsky, but my knowledge of Poland was confined to the little I had gleaned from haphazard reading in the field of musical journalism, popular biographies and so on; this was the first Pole I had ever spoken to.

I discovered that the gang consisted of Austrians, Galicians, Czecho-Slovakians, and one small wasp-waisted Mexican. There was plenty of food for reflection among them all until weariness bludgeoned my mind into insensibility.

§ VIII

Though I had discovered the Bohunks to be perfectly harmless, I was glad to join my own countrymen in the old Colonist-car passenger coach they had commandeered for their sleeping quarters; the large windows admitted plenty of light; a double tier of bunks, made of canvas stretched on a framework of iron tubes, had been built along each side of the coach.

Besides the eleven Harvesters there were a handful of Bohunks quartered in the old coach.

Feeling tired and despondent, I sat apart, until one of the five Scots who had remained behind called out, 'Come ower here, Jock, an' gie us yer chat.'

Taking a seat among them, I listened to the discussion on the Communists who had disappeared and the talk of the events of the past week. So much had happened already that it seemed years since the *Marburn* had sidled into the quay at Quebec!

§ IX

With the exception of two Cockneys, all the Britishers were accustomed to manual labour. They thought nothing of the work on the track and joked good-naturedly about my struggle to keep going. I could see that they liked me, and their encouragement helped me to endure the exhausting labour.

Saturday night came at last, finding me, to my infinite relief, still on the gang. I had a whole day's rest before me; and, if I managed to struggle through the following week, I would have nothing more to fear!

After supper, feeling wonderfully contented and at peace with the world, I lolled on my bunk. Here I was, in a new country, leading a new life among new people, standing on my own feet at last! Oh, it was fine! . . . Eight dollars to the good already . . . forty in the bank!

The problem of existence solved in the meantime, I felt that I could take an interest in everything and everyone around me.

'Ach, I'm fed up,' said a lean, sandy-haired Scot. 'This is hellish . . . nae place tae go when ye come tae the end o' the week an' want a bit o' fun . . . Nae fitba' match, no' a pub or a picture-hoose . . . It's like bein' buried alive . . . This is nae life; a fellah likes a bit o' a chainge when it comes tae the end o' the week.'

This outburst started a long discussion on the compensations of life in the Old Country. The two Cockneys began extolling night-life in London. I had never been in London and never would be now, I told myself as I listened to them describe the crowded streets, the pubs, music-halls, theatres, markets, and all the rest of the London which had been theirs.

'Gor blimey,' wailed the elder Cockney, as he sat sewing a patch on his clothes, 'fancy leavin' all that be'ind an' comin' aht ter this bleedin' plice. Why, him an' me could make six an' seven pahnds a week in London . . . we was tailors. Cor, if we'd known wot it was like out 'ere? . . . Look at 'im,' he cried despairingly, pointing to his thin sickly looking comrade, who lay on his back white and utterly exhausted. 'E ain't fit for this kind of thing, it's killin' 'im. . . . Look at 'im, he ain't well.'

'Weel, by Goad,' snorted the Scot who had complained of the dullness of Mactavish. 'If ye could mak' seeven pun' a week in London ye deserve a' that's comin' tae ye for throwin' up a guid job.'

'Hey boys,' broke in a voice, 'there's a man at the door wants tae ken if ony o' ye wants a job on a fairm.'

'Would any of you boys like a job pitching,' said the blue-overalled farmer, when we went to the door in a body. 'I start thrashing on Monday and need two men . . . I'll pay five dollars a day.'

'We'll take on the job,' said the two English chums.

'All right, boys,' said the farmer, 'get your grips and we'll go right away . . . my auto's waiting up the road.'

I watched them depart. Things happened quickly in Canada! Here to-day, gone to-morrow! . . . That left nine

Harvesters now . . . Who would be the next to go? . . . How long would it be till I was all alone again?

'Is there onythin' ye wid like us tae get for ye?' asked Ned, breaking in on my reverie, 'we're gaun ower tae the shop.'

'I'll go with you,' I said, remembering that I had neither pen nor paper with which to write home an account of my wanderings and adventures up to this point.

After our shopping expedition I went off by myself to watch the sunset. The sky was full of tremendous clouds; the vastness and stillness of the prairie was awesome. Strange how Nature had the same power of stirring me to the uttermost depths of my being, of arousing emotional and spiritual experiences transcending all the pettiness of daily life, as the great Symphonies of Beethoven.

When I returned, the lamp had been lit in the sleeping-car. My workmates lolled at ease on their bunks, smoking, talking, and arguing about their past life. As I had always loved listening to men discussing their philosophy of life, narrating their travels and experiences and so on, I had no complaints to make of the dullness of Mactavish.

'Well, boys, and how are we all?' broke in a soft drawling voice. The newcomer was Clive, our cookee. A dark, slightly built Canadian, with refined features and a gentle manner.

'Come in, boy, and tak' a seat,' cried Ned.

'Gee, but I'm sure glad to get a rest,' began Clive, seating himself beside me. 'Cook's been like a bear with a burnt paw all day . . . nagging an' cursing and finding fault with everything since five-thirty this morning . . . Gee, I'm about all in.'

I liked Clive, who, curiously enough, hailed from Smiths Falls. He had left home in the Spring and wandered aimlessly westward, working on farms and in lumber camps. As the conversation grew more and more intimate, Clive told us how he had broken with a nagging wife. 'Well,' he finished, with a twisted smile, 'it just got that there was nothing else for it but to break away. When a woman begins to interfere with a man's means of earning a living, then I guess it's time to leave her.'

Clive was anxious that I go into partnership with him and outlined a scheme of setting up a chicken-farm in Eastern

Canada. 'With the money we make on this gang,' he said eagerly, 'and maybe a week or two's threshing later on, and then a winter's cookee-ing in the Bush, we would have a big enough stake between us to make a start in the Spring. We could get a shack and "batch it" together and buy the chickens young. The hotels would give us all the scraps we wanted to help feed them. . . I've got the whole thing figured out . . . There's a good living in it for a couple of fellows that stick together and don't get foolin' around with women and booze.'

Making plans in this way was a pleasant way of passing an hour. My life was becoming like one of my improvisations at the piano. I played with one idea for a little then tossed it aside for another, and so, one little episode after another, I carried on, trusting to chance and the inspiration of the moment!

§ x

As a Sunday morning treat we had two boiled eggs for breakfast, followed by flapjacks and syrup. Afterwards we lazed on our bunks. As I trimmed the little military moustache which I was so proud of, after my first shave for a week, I noticed, as I looked into my pocket mirror, that my face was browner and healthier than ever I had seen it before.

'By jove,' I chuckled, as I scrubbed my tennis shirts in an empty oil drum Ned had found, 'wouldn't my mother laugh if she saw me at this minute.' Proud of my first washing, I hung the shirts on the wire fence at the side of the track.

After an hour's letter-writing, I whiled away the rest of the morning sketching the store on a sheet of notepaper. I regretted not bringing a camera with which to keep a record of my wanderings.

In the afternoon Ned and two others asked me to join them in a walk.

Our chief topic as we tramped along the rutted road of sun-baked mud, was the circumstances which had induced us to emigrate and which had thrown us together.

'Naw, naw,' cried Ned, when I asked him if he intended

settling in the country permanently. 'I've got nae intention o' becomin' a Canadian an' takin' up a fairm an' a' that. I've got nae notion o' that kind o' life. I juist came oot here because I read about the Harvestin' scheme in the papers, an' I thocht I might mak' a bit o' money at it . . . I've got a girl at hame, an' when I've made a hunner pounds I'm gaun back tae mairry her; that's whit's brocht me oot here.'

We halted at the first of the farms which were scattered about the wide empty landscape.

'Weel boys, there's no' much use gaun further than this,' said Ned, 'the country looks juist the same as when we started; we micht no' have moved at a'.'

Looking over the flatness, unrelieved by even the gentlest of slopes, I thought of the winding hill-roads of Ayrshire, where every bend reveals new beauties of valley, wood, stream, sea, green hill and rugged mountain; where every old grey village and medieval ruin is steeped in history and legend. Well, I had said farewell to picturesque scenery among a host of other things! I had wished to be in Canada, and there it was all around me!

When we turned back, the grain elevator in the distance resembled a short broad-shouldered man wearing a felt hat and a coat reaching to his ankles. An occasional flivver, driven by men in short sleeves and filled with family parties, rattled past raising clouds of dust, otherwise, we saw no living soul till we saw the Bohunks sunning themselves in front of the cabooses.

§ x i

On Monday morning when I started work at seven o'clock, I considered myself a fully-fledged railroad navvy; one of Karl Marx's proletariat; one of the submerged millions who form the bulk of the world's population.

It was a louring day; thunder rumbled ominously overhead, and lightning flickered among the huge black clouds that shut out the sun. By midday rain was falling and we were compelled to spend the afternoon sitting on our bunks talking.

Next day I sweated my ten hours under a fierce sun.

The refuse dump beside the cook car was the breeding ground of a plague of flies. We've been far too long in this place,' said Clive one night, 'there'll be an epidemic of something or other if we don't move soon.'

The week wore on. The work, once the novelty wore off, was monotonous, mechanical, soul-destroying. One day while 'tamping', I looked over the prairie, wondering what it was that had gone out of my life and made it so empty. A threshing machine was at work in the field beside the track. As I watched the teamsters pitch sheaves on wagons and send the horses galloping towards the machine which had been droning since dawn, a steady stream of chaff spouting high into the air from the nozzle, I suddenly realized that it was my music that I missed. 'Oh, what a fool I've been,' I groaned, seeing myself, in that despondent moment, condemned to a life of coarse toil.

I slept badly during those hot sultry nights; flies pestered us even in our bunks. Towards the end of the week, an irritating spot appeared on my chin, developing into a small scab.

Four of the Harvesters, seized by a Saturday-night pleasure lust, begged for an advance on their wages from the time-keeper and set out for Winnipeg on a hand-car. Even the unimaginative Bohunks began playing poker to relieve the tedium.

Feeling a little lightheaded and feverish, I sat on my bunk that Saturday night listening to Ned, Clive and the two Cockneys yarning.

'My, I had tae laugh at you an' Charlie the ither day,' said Ned to me. 'It was gettin' near stoppin' time an' we were trimmin' up the track. My, but ye were fair beat; oot for the count. Ye were staggerin' aboot as if ye were drunk, an' Charlie came an' watched ye for aboot ten minutes. There wis aboot a haunfu' o' gravel on each spadefu' ye threw up on the ties an' it wid landin' on Charlie's feet . . . Ye were that tired ye never kent he wis there. We a' laughed at ye, Charlie an' a', but ye kent naethin' aboot it'.

Late on Sunday night the men who had gone off on the hand-car returned from their debauch in Winnipeg, bringing besides their descriptions of 'Red Lamps', exciting news of hordes of Harvesters ranging the streets and threatening to pillage the city if they were not returned to the Old Country.

'Boys, ye've nae conception whit it's like in Winnipeg,' they told us breathlessly. 'By gee, there's gaun tae be some fun there if they don't get whit they're oot for. They boys are feart for nothin' . . . They've got the breeze up the folk; they're feart there's gaun tae be a bloody revolution or somethin' like that.'

Revolution and War, were words that aroused in me a sensation of being caught in some horrible kind of trap; they were words which had a sinister meaning to my generation; millions of human souls had been wiped out of existence in the course of my short lifetime by the realities those two words stood for.

The Bohunks had never stopped playing poker since Saturday night, save for meals. They played through Sunday and Sunday night till breakfast time on Monday morning. Their voices rising in sudden anger, awoke me at intervals from a feverish sleep. Glaring across the table at one another with murderous expressions on their faces, the candle casting weird shadows, they seemed, with their shaven bullet-shaped heads and huge bristling moustaches, like the creatures of a nightmare. The way they shouted, with the veins on their necks and foreheads swollen with rage, made me catch my breath in anticipation of seeing knives flash and murder done.

During the following week, about a mile south of headquarters, Charlie set us deepening a water channel under the track. A dreary business. Like a line of ants, we walked in single file to the bottom of the ditch, cut a slice of the stiff black gumbo soil, and carried it on our spades to the surface level where we dumped it on a growing pyramid. Our method

of working reminded me of what I had read of slave labour in ancient civilizations.

What with the flies, the heat, and bad drinking water, everybody's nerves were on edge. The Mexican threw down his shovel during our first morning in the ditch, and, cursing us, walked off. He looked a sick man and swayed as he walked. He was going before he died of dysentery he said.

'Garn, you son-of-a-bitch,' snarled the bigger of the two Cockneys at a young Austrian another afternoon. I was walking towards the bottom of the ditch at the time. I stopped dead as the boy's father rushed forward with his shovel raised menacingly above his head crying harshly, 'You call him son-of-a-bit'; you call him son-of-a-bit'. Muttering angrily the other Bohunks surged forward with upraised shovels. Instinctively the Harvesters drew together. 'Thirty men to nine, we're done,' I told myself as I prepared to defend my life. Charlie saved the situation by running up, shouting, 'Hi, whasamarrer you fellah; why you not working?' Like a classroom of rowdy schoolboys reproved by the entry of an absent master, there was a sudden hush; the raised shovels were lowered and work resumed as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER VI

§ I

It was our last day at Mactavish. Word had come that we were to go to Winnipeg and then proceed West to reinforce a 'steel gang' which was constructing a branch line somewhere in Saskatchewan. The work would be harder, but the fact that the pay was to be forty cents an hour was the cause of rejoicing among the Harvesters.

The prairie shimmered in the morning sun. There was no one near me, as Charlie had set us clearing weeds from between the ties and we worked in extended order. I felt hot, giddy, and weak. My face burned and itched madly; the way the scabs were spreading over my chin alarmed me. Clive thought I had got 'poison-ivy' on my hands and conveyed it to my face; Ned said I had given myself a 'foul shave'; I thought of the farm where Will and I had been told to be careful of the towels we used. 'When we get to Winnipeg,' Clive had said the previous night, 'I'll take you along to the General Hospital. We'll get you fixed up with some ointment that'll clear the trouble away in two shakes.'

I worked listlessly, sure that I would drop down before midday. My heart thumped wildly; I grew cold and hot in turn; my strength ebbed with the passing minutes.

'Hullo, still working with the gang?' said a voice. Looking up, I saw that two khaki-clad men had stopped before me. Dimly I recognized them as the two English chums.

'How did you fare on that farm you went to?' I heard myself asking, in a funny, far-away voice.

'Oh, we got on A.I., we got our five dollars a day without any fuss,' they replied, staring at me curiously.

'Feel all right, old chap?' one of them asked quietly.

'Me? Oh, I'm feeling fine,' I replied, laughing in a weak semi-delirious way.

Telling me that they were heading for the Far West, they passed on.

The morning seemed endless. 'I'm a complete failure in life,' I told myself bitterly, as I struggled against the strange weakness which crept over me. 'This navvying is the only thing I'm fit for, and if I'm not strong enough to stick it out, then it will be just as well if I drop dead with this shovel in my hand.'

I had blurred impressions of crawling on board a hand-car, of sitting in the dining-car trying to eat, and then standing beside Clive and Ned, awaiting the train for Winnipeg.

'I want to call on a friend first,' said Clive as he led me along Main Street on our arrival in the city. After the brooding silence of the prairie, the clattering street-cars, the surging rivers of automobiles, and the thronged sidewalks were phantasmagoric to my feverish eyes.

'Is there a chemist's shop handy, where I could get some sort of ointment for this face of mine?' I asked anxiously.

'I'll take you along to the hospital after I've had a word with my friend,' replied Clive.

'No,' I protested in alarm. 'They might keep me there . . . I want to go to Saskatchewan with the boys to-morrow.'

'You'll be all right at the hospital, sonny,' said Clive soothingly. 'They'll be good to you there and fix you up in two shakes.'

Too weary to argue, I relapsed into silence. We turned into a dingy apartment block, and, mounting a dim staircase, halted before a door; I leant against the banisters for support. 'Well, there's no answer, so I guess he's out of town,' said Clive after repeated knockings.

The shadows of the buildings were long and black when we set out for the General Hospital. I knew I was talking all sorts of rubbish as we walked along; my laugh sounded silly in my ears, and it was queer too, the way the hoardings and the pedestrians across the road wavered and danced up and down!

I was relieved when we reached the large, many-windowed

red-brick building, with its green lawns and young trees, which Clive said was the General Hospital.

Clive explained my situation to a tall thin man behind a counter, who, after listening attentively, said, 'How long's he been out here?'

'He's only been a month in the country,' replied Clive.

'Have you got your "landing-card" as proof of that?' the clerk demanded of me. 'Have you got any money?' he asked, as he examined the slip of paper I handed him.

'Only a few dollars,' I said. The winter was looming ahead and I would need every cent I could scrape together to see me through it!

Pursing his lips, the clerk regarded me thoughtfully for a moment, then he hurried away.

'Wait in here and I'll send a doc. along to look at you,' he said, escorting us on his return to a room all white tiles, glass-topped tables, and white-enamelled cupboards filled with bottles, test-tubes, and shining surgical implements.

'Well, well, and what's the trouble here?' cried a brisk young doctor bustling in, stethoscope protruding from one pocket of his white jacket. 'Let's see,' he began, placing his hands on my shoulders and moving me under the powerful electric lamp suspended from the ceiling, the better to examine my unshaven scabious chin.

'My word, you are hot,' he exclaimed, placing the palm of one hand against my burning forehead. 'Here, sit down there a minute,' he said, pushing me into a chair and hurrying out. When he returned, a young nurse was with him, thermometer in hand.

After taking my temperature the doctor questioned Clive, the three of them held a whispered conference over the thermometer. I kept pinching myself to make sure it wasn't a dream. How had it come about that I was sitting there, feeling so queer, and so far away from home?

'I think you had better stay here to-night,' the doctor said to me in a pleasant way. 'We'll give you a bed and make you comfortable.'

'But I've got to go to Saskatchewan to-morrow,' I said in a

panic-stricken voice. 'Couldn't you just give me something for my face and let me go now?'

'Never mind about to-morrow meantime,' said the doctor soothingly. 'After a good sleep you'll feel lots better . . . We'll see about fixing up your face in the morning. You're not in a fit state to go walking about the city looking for a room, anyway.'

'Yes,' urged Clive. 'You'd best stay here, sonny; they'll fix you up fine and dandy, and I'll be back in the morning to see you.'

Realizing that there was no use fighting against fate, and that I had lost another job, I gave Clive Mr. Reimer's card, and asked him if he would inform my friends of my situation.

'Sure, sonny,' he said as he shook hands. 'You don't have to worry about a single thing . . . I'll fix it all right.'

'Thanks, Clive, you've been a jolly good pal,' I grinned weakly.

The nurse led me along a dim silent corridor, on whose tiled floor my field boots clattered noisily. I was handed a night-gown, a grey dressing-gown, and a pair of slippers, then shown into a bathroom, where, while I was enjoying the luxury of a hot bath, an orderly appeared and removed my clothes.

When I emerged from the bathroom I was shown into a dim, semi-private ward of four beds, one of which was occupied.

It was heavenly to slip into a comfortable bed and lie between deliciously cool clean sheets! Sleep eluded me for hours; distorted fragments of thought raced round and round my tired brain and jumbled crazily together.

§ 11

Morning. A nurse tripped briskly into the ward while I was wondering where my clothes were. She looked about the same age as myself; her blue-black bobbed hair and eyebrows were a vivid contrast to the whiteness of her skin; she was of average height, well-made, and had a firm chin. I thought her most attractive.

Approaching my bed, she placed a thermometer in my mouth in a cheerful businesslike manner. When she removed it, I asked her if I could have my clothes and see a doctor about my face.

'You're going to stay where you are until I say you can get up,' she replied in a determined voice.

'But! . . .' I began to protest.

'There are no "buts" about it, so you can just lie down and be quiet,' she interrupted grimly.

My sudden smile completely disarmed her. She tried to frown, and then, to preserve her dignity, retreated hurriedly.

'That was Nurse Macleod; she's a fine girl,' said the only other occupant of the ward, in a slow high-pitched voice. The speaker was a tall thin man with the brick-coloured complexion of an Anglo-Indian. Sitting bolt upright in bed, his back supported by pillows, he told me he was just recovering from an outbreak of eczema on his head. 'I'm over seventy,' he chuckled with pride, 'and I've served more years in the Army than any other soldier in Canada.' He repeated this fact several times as we breakfasted.

The diet of buttered toast, fish, and weak tea, I was put on was a welcome change from the rough fare of the extra-gang, but there was so little of it.

'Here, you have this toast, I don't eat much now,' said the Old Soldier, holding a plate towards me. 'Come on,' he insisted, 'a young fellow needs plenty of food . . . it'll be left otherwise . . . Take it quick before Nurse Macleod comes back and catches us.'

One side of the ward contained small-paned windows stretching from floor to ceiling; they looked out on a segment of parched lawn, a few young trees, a stretch of cement pathway, a section of high brick wall; part of an annex shut out the rest of the world. Through the door leading to the corridor, I caught glimpses of white-jacketed doctors and uniformed nurses hurrying up and down; through the window I saw young men, grey dressing-gowns over their pyjamas, parading the lawn like medieval monks.

Clive, Ned, and the two Cockneys came into the ward well

on in the morning. Caps in hand, they grouped themselves round my bed and tried with awkward phrases to convey their sympathy. Their concern for my misfortune touched me. Those long blistering days on the track had drawn the diminishing band of Harvesters together closer than I had realized.

'We've been to see your friends,' said Clive. 'And they were just fine . . . You haven't a thing to worry about; they'll stand by you all right. They said they would be right along to see you this evening.'

The Old Soldier raised a laugh when he said, 'Oh, your friend's quite happy where he is, he's got a nice young lady to look after him.'

'We leave to-night for Saskatchewan,' said Ned. 'We're all fixed up now wi' the construction gang at forty cents an hoor.'

Shaking hands with me and wishing me good-bye and good luck, the men filed out of the ward. A wave of desolation swept over me. Once more I was alone, without a job! . . . How long would they keep me in hospital? . . . What was I to do when I left it? . . . Would I ever leave it alive? . . . People often died in hospitals! I laid my head on my pillow and felt utterly wretched; my mind occupied with morbid thoughts of death.

My spirits recovered a little when Nurse Macleod appeared with our lunch. The Old Soldier, glad of an audience, chatted about himself as we ate. Though over sixty years of age at the time, he had attempted to enlist at the outbreak of the Great War. His tales of being 'under fire' in India, and South Africa during the Boer War, interested me. Like so many other soldiers I had questioned, I found it impossible to gain from him any idea of what a man felt like during a battle.

'Oh no,' he chuckled, when I asked him if he was Canadian born. 'I was born in England. I lived in London and got into trouble with a girl when I was a lad of seventeen, so I ran away and joined the army.'

I pondered over the last statement and tried to piece together the fragments of the old man's talk. I wondered what

had happened to the girl he had deserted, and what sort of tale she would have to tell if she was still alive to tell it. It was growing clearer every day that life was a queer haphazard affair, and that the 'happy-endings' of the cinema and popular fiction were the exception rather than the rule.

Mr. and Mrs. Reimer came to see me in the evening.

'If you had only stayed in Winnipeg,' said Mrs. Reimer in great concern while her husband hurried back into the corridor, 'we could have got you a job in an office the very week you left us.'

When Mr. Reimer returned to my bedside, I was relating to his wife the events which had led up to my presence there.

'I've just been having a word with the nurse,' he said. 'Do you know that you were walking about the streets before you came in here, with a temperature so high that you might have dropped down dead at any minute? We came to take you home at once, but the hospital people won't let you be moved till your temperature goes back to normal; they're afraid it might be typhoid fever you've got.'

They stayed at my bedside as long as possible, talking about Scotland and people they had known in the past, and saying, when they departed, that Natalie and her friends would call next evening.

§ 111

'When is a doctor coming to look at this face of mine?' I begged of Nurse Macleod next morning.

'He'll be in this morning sure,' she replied, with a flash of brown eyes and a charming smile.

'I feel like an old tramp with this beard, and I can't get a shave till this chin has healed up,' I complained.

'Why, do you think the girls won't look at you like that?' mocked my pretty black-haired tyrant.

'Ha! ha! She got you that time my lad,' laughed the Old Soldier, as she marched out.

But no doctor came to see me that day.

'Gee!' cried Natalie, when she appeared with two attractive girl friends. 'Your face ain't nearly so bad as I thought it would be . . . Mother said it was *terrible*.'

With their boyish slanginess and complete freedom from artificiality they soon put me at my ease, and a light jesting conversation sprang up in which the Old Soldier joined.

'Oh, he's a great favourite,' he told them, with a twinkle in his old blue eyes. 'The nurses keep running in and out all day long . . . It's that smile of his that does it . . . You young ladies had better be careful; he's dangerous.'

§ 1 v

The days dragged past. I began to despair of ever seeing a doctor and being released. I longed for movement and the open air. In retrospect, the rough life at Mactavish now seemed like paradise compared with my present situation. I lived the long hot days on the track over again, and saw once more the farm-dotted prairie, with mile-long freight trains crawling over it, like tiny worms over an enormous yellow billiard table. I recalled the long talks in the evenings, and remembered how the pyramids of chaff left by the threshing machines lit up the sky at night when the farmers set them blazing. Little incidents came back. How the Bohunks had coveted my topboots and kept sidling up, saying with a smile, 'How much you sell boots?' And once, when I opened my cabin-trunk to show Ned my fleece-lined leather jacket, they had crowded round me like eager children, stroking and fingering the smooth leather with loving fingers, crying excitedly, 'How much you sell? How much you sell?' The childlike curiosity and simple-mindedness of the Bohunks seemed pathetic, now that I looked back on them. They came from lands where, I had been taught to believe, peasants had been crushed under the heels of despots since the beginning of things, and which in my own time had been ravaged by wars, revolutions, famines, and plagues! How lucky I was to have been born in Scotland, a free country; where a man was

allowed to think, write, say, and, within reason, act as he please!

Vividly I remembered an old Scot who had been with the Bohunks before the Harvesters joined the gang. When Ned first told me about the old man he had cried indignantly, 'He's brought up a family, an' the dirty swine have left him stranded in his auld age. Pair auld sowl, this is a' that's left for him . . . navvyin' like this; it's a damnt shame!'

One evening we had talked with the old man.

'Is it so very cold in winter?' I asked him, when he expressed his dread of the coming months.

'Oh yes . . . cold . . .,' the old man whispered, rubbing his gnarled hands together and drawing up his shoulders with a shiver. A small shrunken man; grey of face and hair; resigned to his fate.

'And is there no work at all in Canada in winter?' I asked.

'No, no,' he replied in the same whispered monotone, chilling in its hopelessness. 'No work . . . nothing to do . . . and cold, cold.'

And now I lay in a hospital ward, fretting away the days, while the cold breath of winter was shrivelling the leaves outside on the lawn.

The Old Soldier grew restive also and began voicing his irritation aloud. We got on one another's nerves.

'Why don't you get your hair cut?' he shouted at me once.

Taken unaware by his outburst I started violently, then recovering myself, said heatedly, 'Why the devil don't you mind your own business? How dare you, sir, talk to me in that manner!'

We glared, snorted indignantly at one another, and turning our backs to each other, maintained a frigid silence for the rest of the day.

§ v

A day or two later, a grating voice began shouting in the corridor. 'Where is this woman? . . . Why did you let her in here?' The tone of the man's voice was brutal; the answering

voice was almost inaudible. 'The police are after her,' bawled the first voice, 'she'll have to be cleared out of here at once.' There was a confused murmur, then another outburst. 'This new man? . . . When was he brought in? . . . What's wrong with him? . . . What d'you say his name is? . . . Walker!'

At the sound of my own name I started; I strained my ears to catch what followed. Who was this irate individual? Were the police after me too? . . . What on earth had I done? . . . Was illness and misfortune a crime in Canada? . . . I had heard that a man found wandering about the streets with no address, money, or visible means of support, was put in jail! Good God! What a mess it all was!

'There are far too many of these young fellows coming out to this country and getting into trouble in one way or another,' the voice rasped. 'You low blighter,' I muttered furiously to myself, 'I'd like to get up and knock your words down your throat.'

'Has he any money?' demanded the voice.

'Ah, that was it,' I told myself, with sinking heart. 'They've searched my pockets and found from my pass-book that I've got forty dollars in the bank after saying I had none. They'll charge me with gaining admittance to the hospital under false pretences.' With such ludicrous imaginings filling my head, hourly I waited the arrival of the police.

§ V I

The Old Soldier was discharged at last. For a day his bed remained unoccupied, then an elderly bald-headed man, moaning and complaining in a pitiful way, was wheeled into the ward on a trolley. When the attendants lifted him into the bed vacated by the Old Soldier, I saw that his whole body was brick-red, and that there was a huge growth in the centre of his stomach.

There was little quietness after the newcomer's arrival. There was no escaping from his groans and the long continual wail he poured into my ears. 'O God! O God! What have I

done to deserve suffering like this . . . You know I've always lived a good honest life and done nobody any wrong! Oh, oh, oh!" Now and then he stopped arguing and pleading with his God, to treat me to a detailed account of the history of his eczema. How he had been planting cabbages on his farm in spring, and how little red spots had appeared, first round his wrists and ankles, finally covering his whole body. I was sorry for the old fellow for the first two days. But when he began finding fault with the nurses, the food, and the fact that friends came to see me, and so on, I lost all my pity for him and regarded him as a whining old nuisance who should have been put into a lethal chamber and not a hospital.

There was another arrival that day; a lean dark complexioned man about twenty-seven years of age. He had been married a fortnight, he said, in telling me his story. 'I've been having trouble with my kidneys,' he told me. 'The doctors here think it's venereal disease; but I don't see how that can be. When I was out in France during the War I got a "dose", but they cured me then.' I moved uneasily in my bed and felt as if in the presence of a leper. Next morning he was removed with his blankets to the two wards at the top of the corridor which were occupied by the young men I saw strolling about the grounds.

A tall thin Scot took his place. He suffered from eczema like the old man in the other bed. The 'seven year itch', he called it. 'I'm in my seventh year's now,' he said, scratching his forearms vigorously as he spoke. 'That old guy there's in his first year. I was like that too once. He'll never see through seven years of it as I've done . . . it'll kill him long before that.'

Being a commercial traveller, the newcomer was able to tell me much about the state of business in Winnipeg. What he told me was depressing; business went bankrupt, men fell into debt and misfortune just as in Scotland. 'Winnipeg goes dead in winter,' he reiterated. He was one of those tiresomely useful people who are always bustling about doing odd jobs and letting everybody 'know about it'. He made his own bed, and ran up and down the corridor at meal times, bearing

trays to other wards, until everybody protested that they didn't want to catch his 'seven year itch', and his activity was curbed.

I was still a little light-headed, and, when I got out of bed, unsteady on my feet, but my temperature was returning to normal. Every morning, when I asked Nurse Macleod when a doctor was coming to look at my face, she assured me 'He'll be here to-day sure.' At last she brought in a young white-coated doctor; a Jew, small, alert, pale of face, jet black of hair. 'I'll give you an ointment, and we'll see if that will help you,' he said, after examining my scabious chin. From the first application of the ointment which was brought, my chin began to heal like magic.

§ V I I

The next arrival was a man in the D.T.s; a giant of a fellow, with a huge paunch and a deep rumbling voice. He was brought in at night, arguing loudly with the crowd of friends, doctors and nurses who accompanied him. They coaxed him into the one empty bed left in the ward.

'Now gimme that brandy the doctor said I was to get,' rumbled the newcomer to the nurse who remained at his bedside when the others departed.

'You'll get it in half an hour,' she replied.

'But I wan' it ri' now, I tell you.'

'You can't get it just now, it's against doctor's orders!'

'But God, I can't wait half an hour . . . I'm dyin' for a drink ri' now . . . Come on, nurse, be a sport.'

'If you lie quiet, I'll fetch you one in a minute.'

There was a sudden thrashing of bedclothes and an outburst. 'Hell, I wan' it now . . . I've gotta have a drink . . . What the hell are you paid for? . . . Go an' get me a drink . . . Oh, God, I'm goin' myself, lemme get out of this.'

'Oh, oh, oh, why don't they keep him quiet? I can't sleep with all this noise goin' on,' quavered the old man on my right, beginning to add his voice to the uproar.

A glass of brandy quietened the newcomer for five minutes and then it all began again. Sleep was impossible. The excitement gave me a headache. I felt weak and shaky, and my forehead burned like fire. How long the big man stayed and what eventually happened to him I know not, but at last, towards dawn, there was peace, and I drifted into an uneasy sleep.

§ V I I I

I grinned feebly when Nurse Macleod came to take my temperature in the morning. She walked away with the thermometer in her hand; glancing casually at it she stopped dead. 'Do you feel all right?' she asked anxiously, coming back to my bedside. 'Not bad,' I replied, feeling like a washed out rag. 'A bit of a headache after last night's fun, that's all.'

Nurse Macleod disappeared. She returned with the young Jewish doctor and the matron. The concern they showed as they examined me made me feel that I was really ill. My temperature having gone rocketing up, I was put on a starvation diet and given strict orders not to stir out of bed.

The commercial traveller had ferreted out some facts about the D.T. patient. 'His business was burned down, and he's been worryin' and hitting up the booze ever since,' he told me. 'I expect he's been drinking wood alcohol or something like that. That's what happens with this prohibition racket . . . A man can't get decent stuff to drink, so he poisons himself with wood alcohol . . . Knocks them blind that stuff; paralyses them; makes them mad . . . I've seen it often. They're brought in here raving . . . Takes about six men to put them in a strait-waistcoat . . . They're usually dead in the morning.'

§ I X

By the expression on their faces when Mr. and Mrs. Reimer entered the ward a few evenings later, I realized that something serious had happened.

'We've brought bad news, Jim,' began Mrs. Reimer quietly, sitting down by my bedside; her husband, thin, neat, precise, standing behind her chair.

'From home?' I asked, a sudden fear almost depriving me of my voice. 'Is somebody ill, or . . .' I couldn't bring myself to utter the word 'dead'.

'No, it's your father's business,' replied Mrs. Reimer. 'It's gone smash.'

'Gone smash,' I repeated vaguely. I heard them say as I tried to grasp the import of this news, 'We'll look after you when you leave this place . . . We want you to look on our place as your home . . . We'll do everything in our power to get you fixed up in some sort of a job when you're on your feet again.' They added a great deal more in this strain. 'My word,' said Mrs. Reimer, 'but it shows you how bad things must be in the Old Country, when old-established businesses like your father's "come down".'

When my friends had gone, my fevered thoughts went whirling round and round in circles endeavouring vainly to cope with this latest blow. There was no question of writing home for money and returning to Scotland now! My world had dissolved into chaos! I was stranded with a vengeance! How was I going to exist, let alone help my people at home? For despairing hours, until sleep mercifully closed my eyes, I wrestled with my new problems.

§ x

In keeping with my dreary thoughts and outlook, the sky was leaden next day. Large snowflakes drifted down, filling me with alarm. Had winter come so soon, finding me jobless, with disaster behind me in Scotland, and complete darkness ahead?

However, I was too young for gloomy thoughts to last long; my temperature was returning to normal, and my face healing in a manner which delighted the enthusiastic young doctor.

With the return of the sun next day my spirits took a more optimistic turn. I began making plans; eager to be out in the world again. There was bound to be a job awaiting me out there! When I was settled down and getting on a bit, I would be able to help my people at home, and later, they would come out and join me and begin afresh in the West.

CHAPTER VII

§ I

My last day in hospital. Dressed in the clothes I had worn at Mactavish and minus my beard, I went as directed, to the pay-desk in the entrance hall. The girl told me that my bill amounted to over sixty dollars. 'But it's all right,' she added with a sweet smile. 'You can pay it in your own time . . . there's no hurry.'

'I've got money due to me from the C.P.R.,' I hastened to explain, 'and I've got . . .'

'There's no need to touch that; you can pay when you are in a position to afford it,' she broke in.

That was decent of the hospital people, after the dialogue I had overheard outside my ward a week previously!

'Come on, old socks,' cried Max, who had called for me. 'I've got the old boat waitin' outside. Gee, but you're lookin' swell now . . . I bet you're glad to git on your feet again. But say,' Max rolled his eyes heavenwards, 'that sure was a peach of a nurse you had there . . . What you call her? . . . Gosh, but I wouldn't mind a week's illness myself with that dame to hold my hand; no sir.'

It was a perfect Indian Summer day; the sun as bright as ever; only now and then, a brown withered leaf floating gently down from trees full of autumn fire, proclaimed the fact that it was the last week in September. Like a wild bird newly released from a cage I gloried in my freedom. Max and I laughed and chattered like a pair of schoolboys as we drove through the now familiar Main Street and Portage Avenue into the quiet residential district the Reimers lived in.

§ II

'Welcome home, Jim,' cried Mrs. Reimer, coming out into the tiny veranda as Max shut off the engine and we climbed out of the car.

'Gee, but I sure had a tough time gettin' him away,' laughed Max. 'You oughta seen the nurses weepin' on his neck.'

'I'll show you up to your room first,' said Mrs. Reimer, when I entered the cupboard-like hall. The smallness of rooms in Canadian houses was because of the difficulty of heating them in winter, she explained as we mounted the steep and narrow stairs. 'This is the little spare bedroom I've got ready for you,' she said, opening a door. 'I've put your clothes in the drawers there ready for you. Max brought your grip back from the office the day those men came to tell us about your being in hospital. My word, they gave us a fright. We had often talked about you, after you went away, and wondered what had happened to you. Now, Jim, we're not having you running away among all these Bohunks and Wops and goodness knows what all, any more. I've written to your mother telling her all about your illness and that she's not to worry about you. We've all got our eyes open, and the very first job we hear about, we'll pull all the strings we can. But in the meantime, we want you to take a holiday for a fortnight, and just do nothing but have a good time. Now, I'll leave you to change while I hurry down and see about supper.'

I changed into a blue serge lounge suit, carefully adjusted my necktie, and sleeked my hair straight back. I had said good-bye to Canada in the raw and was once more in the familiar atmosphere of Suburbia! But heavens! I had to get a job at once! I couldn't stay here indefinitely!

I found Max sprawled in an arm-chair in the tiny sitting-room, idly turning over the pages of a *Popular Mechanics* Magazine.

'I wonder what's happened to those other ginks?' he said pensively.

'I haven't the foggiest idea,' I replied, taking stock of my surroundings. 'They might be in Alaska or Alabama for all I know.' My eye fastened on the upright player-piano against the wall on my right; beside it stood a cabinet gramophone with a pile of records; there was a small bookcase filled with books; the bijou dining-room was screened off by thick red velvet hangings.

Max had served in France with the Canadian troops and had revisited Scotland while on leave. 'You'll never go back to Scotland, Jim,' he told me, shaking his head. 'If you do, you'll never be able to live there . . . Gosh! the rain, and the grey skies, and the fogs! . . . And all those hills shutting out the sky! . . . Don't know what it is . . . But gee, once you get out here into the sunshine, with life hummin' around you, and things gettin' done . . . Well, it just gets you . . . Mind you, things ain't any too bright in Winnipeg right now, but wait till a boom comes along and then . . . Oh boy!'

There was a sound of footsteps and voices on the veranda and then Mr. Reimer, Natalie, and Otto, bustled into the room.

I was attempting to answer four questions at once when Mrs. Reimer's voice behind the heavy curtains called, 'Come along folks, supper's ready.'

§ 111

Foremost among topics discussed at table, was the horde of disillusioned Harvesters stranded in the city and clamouring to be sent back to Britain, and the coming visit of the Prince of Wales.

I was bewildered by the slang and mystified by the Middle West viewpoint on European affairs. The English of Addison, Steele, and Charles Lamb was battered out of all recognition by the buoyant Max, the shrill Natalie, and the cynical Otto.

Mr. Reimer was quick to notice my hesitating speech. 'You must get rid of that backwardness of yours, my boy,' he said. 'Winnipeg's got no time for people unless they are smart and alert in their speech and whole bearing. This is no country for the man with an inferiority complex. You've got to bluff out here and let people see you're It . . . We've no time for dreamers out here, Jim.'

'Gee,' said Otto incisively, 'the guy that starts dreamin' out here'll soon get wakened up with a good swift kick on the pants.'

§ 1 v

Max, Natalie and Otto took me to a cinema after supper. On the way we picked up a short sturdily-built fellow, with rounded shoulders and wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. Max introduced him as Cliff, his bosom pal. Our party was still further augmented by Vic, Natalie's fiancé, a slim handsome youth with a pleasant voice and a charming manner.

The multitude of crazy electric signs in Portage Avenue dazzled and bewildered me. Coloured lights flared, blacked out, then rocketed up the sides of tall buildings; they whirled in maddening circles and jazzed fantastically from side to side. The sudden transition from the empty prairie and the hospital, with its hurrying nurses and doctors, and grim vignettes of what life can degenerate into, to the brightness and gaiety of Portage Avenue made me forget my troubles.

Having been familiar with the super-cinemas of Glasgow for years, I was not so impressed with the magnificence of the 'Metropolitan' as my friends expected. The only thing that was novel to me was the pipe-organ, its console on one side of the orchestral pit and its ranks of gilt-painted pipes distributed round the walls of the auditorium.

That night, stimulated by the cinema music, I placed four books on the small table by my bedside: *Master Musicians* and *Great Musicians of the Present Day* by C. Hadden, *Ignaz Jan Paderewski* by E. G. Baughan, and Annette Hullah's *Theodor Leschetizky*.

§ v

The sound of a slamming door and people stirring downstairs, caused me to jump out of bed next morning and rush through the ceremony of dressing, washing and shaving.

'Say,' cried Mrs. Reimer, when I entered the dining-room, 'You should have stayed another hour in bed . . . Remember you're just out of hospital.'

'I know, but I've had all I want of lying in bed thinking

about things,' I answered. 'I'd be far happier out of doors looking for work.'

'Well,' said Mr. Reimer. 'You could at least walk round and get to know your way about. You want to get to know the city from A to Z. Otto here, knows every darn street in Winnipeg, and just about all there is to know about everybody of any kind of importance. He's in Insurance, and it's part of his business. If you take my advice, you'll never go out without memorizing the names of at least half a dozen streets; that's how he does it.'

We went out to the car.

'Gee, ain't the old boat stickin' it out fine,' crowed Max, as the engine started up without a murmur; Otto, Vic, and he were going off on the first of October on a motor tour. Max was like a lover discussing the moods of his beloved, the way he talked of his car.

There was a car in front of every other house; the crisp morning air was filled with the jarring sound of self-starters, the racing of engines, and the cheerful morning greetings of neighbours. Everything was so bright, the paintwork of the little wooden bungalows, the autumn tints in the young trees planted along the strips of turf in front of the houses, the blue cloudless sky, even the grey baked mud of the road, that I felt happy despite my precarious place in the scheme of things.

'Keep your peepers skinned for speed-cops,' said Max, when we joined the main stream of traffic speeding citywards along Portage Avenue. He talked of the stringent motor laws and the speed limit of fifteen miles per hour.

Besides a hundred others, the car was parked in a street behind Portage Avenue. Business people were rushing frantically towards the office blocks from all points of the compass.

Lifting up the bonnet of the car, Max removed a vital part from the magneto, saying, 'That's bettern' any padlock, Jim. No crook can steal the old boat while I've got this in my pocket.'

'Much troubled with car-thieves in Winnipeg?' I asked, as I accompanied him into a neighbouring office-block.

'Car thieves!' echoed Max. 'I'll tell the world we got car thieves. Winnipeg's just full of crooks. They slip up from the States when it gets too hot for them down there, an' then beat it back when it gets too hot for them up here.'

§ V I

With a fast-beating heart I scanned the 'Help Wanted' columns of the *Free Press*. This was the first time in my life I had scanned the newspapers in search of work. All the ads. seemed to be for men with experience and specialized training of one kind and another. Those words 'experience' and 'specialized training' chilled me. How utterly unfitted I was for the modern business world!

One ad. caught my eye. I hurried away from the Reimers' office, and, at the corner of Main Street and McDermot Avenues, at the top of a fourteen-story office block, found the place I sought.

'Waal, wha'd'ya want?' snapped one of the two hard-faced men in the room a stenographer ushered me into. Acutely conscious of their cold calculating eyes and assuming a brisk, efficient business manner, I said, 'I've called about your advertisement in this morning's *Free Press*.'

'We got a man,' grunted the one who had spoken. Swivelling his chair round abruptly, he presented his back to me and closed the interview, if such it could be called.

'Good morning, gentlemen,' I said, as politely as my quivering state would permit.

The tall buildings frowned on me as I made my way with burning face towards the C.P.R. offices to collect a cheque for wages earned at Mactavish.

I felt better when I had cashed my cheque. A roll of green-backed dollar bills in my pocket gave me a comfortable feeling of security. Something was bound to turn up!

I began to explore the city. I stared at buildings and shop windows, and wondered about the people hurrying to and

fro. What did they all do for a living? How had they secured their positions?

Winnipeg began to shrink a little. All the principal stores, cinemas, theatres, hotels, restaurants, and office buildings were, I discovered, situated in Portage Avenue or Main Street.

§ V I I

'I wouldn't depend too much on newspaper ads. for a situation,' said Mr. Reimer at lunch time.

'I'll say,' broke in Otto cynically. 'Ninety per cent of those ads. are put in by firms tryin' to catch out their employees applyin' for other jobs. They put in a box-number so's you can't tell who the advertiser is; then, if any of the poor suckers in their own firm replies, thinkin' to get a better job, they fire them for bein' dissatisfied . . . Yeah laugh! . . . You don't believe me, you think you know all about it, do you? . . . All right, you Old Country sap, you wait an' see. You don't know nothin' about Canada yet.'

'Aw, they're not all that bad,' objected Max. 'There's lots of guys get jobs through the newspapers, I guess, that we know nothin' about. Don't you listen to that gink, Jim, he ain't as smart as he thinks he is; no sir.'

After lunch I discovered, in a little side street off Main Street, a number of employment bureaus haunted by Bohunks and lean hard-faced Canadians. The jobs chalked up on the blackboards were all for the farm and the Bush. Ragged Harvesters paraded the broad sidewalks of Main Street. Group after group passed me, arm in arm; taking up the width of the pavement, they forced the hustling Winnipegians and the big solemn Bohunks to the wall or gutter.

Where was One-Eye and his comrades? How had it come about that the world had got into this mess? Bolshevism versus Capitalism; machinery versus hungry men! Why were men denied the right to work? The world, when I contemplated it as a whole, filled me with dismay and apprehension.

§ VIII

Max, Otto and Vic set out in the highest of spirits for their motor tour. I envied them. Getting a job in Winnipeg was proving no simple matter. My lack of training and experience in the types of business carried on in the city, chiefly banking and insurance, was a source of constant misgiving and the cause of timidity and hesitancy when interviewing people. The absolute necessity of getting a job, no matter how humble, dominated my waking hours and became an obsession. Worry drove me to seek refuge in my music.

§ IX

Mr. Reimer took me for a round of golf on the Saturday afternoon following the departure of Max and Otto. As we played over a flat sun-baked golf course, he talked of his first years in Canada and the rebuffs he had met with.

'You want to get something to do,' said Mr. Reimer earnestly. 'Never mind if the wage is only enough to pay your bare expenses. I think you are far too easily discouraged, Jim. It doesn't do to get downhearted because you get a few knocks . . . We all get knocks in this world, and we've just got to learn to take no notice of them. You've got to stand up to people and give them back as good as you get. Canada is a hard country and people out here take you at your own valuation, so you've got to bluff and convince them that you're somebody. If anyone asks you if you can do a thing, say you can, whether you know anything about it or not, and if you get a job and they find you out, well . . . what does it matter? . . . All they can do is fire you.'

At the next tee-ing green he asked me what my great ambition in life was.

'Well,' I said, after some hesitation. 'I had ambitions as a concert-pianist until I decided to come to Canada.'

'Well, Jim,' said Mr. Reimer, after thinking this over. 'If I

were you and had an ambition like that, I'd go right ahead. But if you're anxious to get on at music in this country, the proper thing to do is to make a name for yourself in Europe first. People out here are more impressed by a man with a European reputation than one who is trying to earn a name among themselves . . . If you would like to teach, we would help you to get pupils and give you the use of the sitting-room and piano until you can afford a studio. In any case, it might be a darned good side-line for you.'

Mrs. Reimer and Natalie were enthusiastic when he brought the subject up again at supper time. 'Gee,' cried Natalie, 'look at old Professor Arlington . . . He's got dozens of kids runnin' to him for lessons at a dollar a time . . . I bet he's makin' fifty a week easy.'

'You want to get cards printed and insert an advert. in the *Tribune* and *Free Press*,' said Mr. Reimer in his practical way.

My imagination seized on the idea. Save for the bare rudiments, I had no theoretical knowledge of music. Like the young Schumann, I found inspiration for my improvisations not in text-books, but in the literary aspect of things, and in the intense emotional life I lived within myself. But teaching music was something I could devote myself to in a whole-hearted way, and like other men, I could learn.

§ x

The Reimers worked hard on my behalf. Every day I had an appointment with some business man or other they had got in touch with, but the reply was always the same, 'Sorry we've nothing for you at present, but look in again sometime when you're passing.' I visited banks, insurance offices, department stores, even window-cleaners, but it was useless.

Once, in the palatial offices of a famous insurance company, the supercilious madame who interviewed me, asked me where I had been educated.

'Glasgow High School,' I replied.

'Oh! but of course you understand that the standard of education in Canada is much higher than in Scotland,' she

said, with a stare calculated to impress me with my insignificance.

For once I refused to be overawed. This insult to my native country and my old school was too much to stand from any blasted Canadian! Had I not been brought up in the belief that the Scots were the most intelligent and best educated race in the world? Telling the lofty dame what I thought of her remark, I walked out with my head held high. Canadians more intelligent than Scots! Phew! That would take some swallowing!

The psychological effect of disappointment after disappointment, of hopes soaring with the news of every fresh interview only to be dashed to the ground, was a growing despondency and sense of frustration and futility.

An official in the C.P.R. offices said to me one day, 'I'm sorry, but all I can offer you is rough manual labour on a construction gang. You'll find it very difficult to get a white-collar job in Winnipeg; you see, so many business men in the city have sons of their own leaving college who are naturally given preference to newcomers.'

'The Land of Opportunity!' I sneered, as I walked along Portage Avenue afterwards, recalling the Emigration propaganda at home. A pack of lies! Life is as difficult in the New World as in Europe! The free democratic West! Pah! Bunkum! I worked myself into a passion of indignation, and, in the grim serious manner of youth, drew fanciful pictures of myself achieving power and fame and exposing all this lying propaganda.

Mrs. Reimer had a surprise in store for me when I returned for lunch that day; Ralph and Owen had 'phoned up to say that they were in Winnipeg and wanted to know where I was.

§ x i

Brown withered leaves fluttered down ominously from the trees lining a street close to the heart of the city. I stopped before a house with a decayed look; at a bow window on the ground floor stood Ralph and Owen, grinning and beckoning.

'But why didn't you 'phone us up when you got the sack from that second farm?' demanded Owen, when the excitement of our reunion had died down. 'We could have got you a job on our farm once the stooking was over.' Owen had dropped his genial buffoonery and assumed the dictatorial air which was a relic of his war-time army commission. They were brown as Indians and glowing with health.

'What's the use of going into that business now?' I replied, bristling at Owen's tone.

'And what do you intend doing now?' he asked coldly. 'You can't stay indefinitely with the Reimers, you know.'

I knew that only too well; the fact haunted me night and day; I was in a horrible situation and needed no reminding.

'I'm looking for work at present,' I said.

'Work,' he sneered. 'But who's going to employ you? What can you do? You've got no experience; you're not fit to hold a job in an office.'

'Hi, you two, shut up,' yelled Ralph, who lay full length on the bed. 'God, what d'you want to spend a fine afternoon fighting for?

'What's the use of worrying?

'It never was worth while,

'So, pack up your troubles . . .'

he began singing in a loud unmelodious voice. 'G-r-r, I'm starving . . . Come on, boys, and we'll get something to eat.'

In an Italian restaurant in Portage Avenue I discovered the cause of the discord I had sensed between Ralph and Owen.

'Do you know that it's costing us ten dollars a week for meals alone?' Owen told me. 'You can't get a decent meal under forty cents. Living is scandalously dear in Winnipeg; I'm going East to Toronto, where conditions are better.'

'How the hell do you know conditions are better in Toronto?' said Ralph testily. 'You don't know any more about Canada and conditions than I do, you're only guessing. I'm staying in Winnipeg as long as it suits me . . . You can go to Toronto or hell for all I care. I'm damned if I give all the money I've earned to the C.P.R. in rail fares.'

They wrangled until the proprietor came up; a huge man encased in rolls of fat; good humour and a colossal pride in his restaurant was written all over his greasy perspiring face. He treated Ralph and Owen as old and valued friends.

'Take us to the best picture-house in Winnipeg,' said Ralph to me when we returned to the street. 'God, I want a holiday after eight weeks' harvesting. I wish you had been with us, Jim,' he added warmly. 'We made over a hundred and fifty dollars. We had some great times at the week-ends, driving about the prairie with the farmer's son and visiting the neighbours.' While he rattled on vivaciously to me, Owen walked in silence, a pronounced swagger in his carriage.

Night had fallen, and Portage Avenue, ablaze with light, was filled with home-going and pleasure-seeking Winnipegians.

Since the departure of Max and Otto I had been too much alone with my thoughts, but I forgot my troubles in the company of Ralph and Owen and with the aid of the mental drug supplied by the cinema, with its languorous darkness, sensuous music, and the romantic impossible lives lived by the shadowy creatures who flickered across the screen.

§ X I I

The 'voyageurs' returned at the end of that week, bronzed by the sun and dry prairie winds, and mentally drunk with the wonders of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

'Say,' croaked Max during their first meal, 'I thought we knew sumpin' in Winnipeg, but gee! the Yanks 've got us beat in everythin' . . . Gas at ten cents a gallon! An' speedin' wow! . . . When we got into Minneapolis, I kep' up a steady fifteen-an-hour, like up here, but gosh! . . . "Come on, whatya dreamin' about? Step on it", shouts the cop on point dooty at the first big crossin' . . . Crikey, they were whizzin' past me at forty miles an hour in the downtown district. Golly, I never saw anythin' like it before . . . An' the buildin's; say, Otto, didn't I just say that Winnipeg looked like one of those lil' hick prairie burgs when we came back to-day?'

Otto and he waxed lyrical about nights under canvas at the camping grounds of farm towns in the Dakotas and Minnesota.

'Even the hoboes in the States ride about in flivvers,' said Max. 'We had guys comin' up tryin' to bum gas off us every night, when we were sittin' round the ole camp fire. Tough! Gee, we did see some tough-lookin' bunches of crooks.'

Impressed by the vast wealth and the business ability of the Americans, Otto was now burning for Canada's secession to the U.S.A. 'What use is all the Old Country bull anyway?' he cried vehemently, some nights later. 'What do we get out of all that boloney about "God save the King", and "Rule Britannia"? . . . The British are only a crowd of dead-beats; the Yanks've got them beat'n everythin'.'

I was stunned by this heresy. Canada leave the British Empire and throw in its lot with the Yanks! God, what next?

This was my first glimpse of Canadian politics, and the history I had been taught at school, confirmed by the constant blaring assurances of the British Press of the loyalty of all the Overseas Dominions, had left me unprepared for Otto's violence.

'But Canada can't throw in its lot with the States without the consent of the Old Country,' I declared hotly.

'Oh, and why can't it?' demanded Otto in a voice like the thrust of a rapier.

'Why?' I replied, surprised at the emotions aroused by the subject of our argument. 'Because Canada is a British Colony.' An unsuspected pride of race surged up within me as I visualized the daring adventurers who had wrested Canada from the resisting hands of the French and the aboriginal Indians. 'Dead-beats' was barely a fitting term for the inhabitants of that small island which had built up the greatest Empire in the history of the human race!

'G'wan, you poor boob,' scoffed Otto. 'Where d'ya git that Colonial bunk? . . . Canada belongs to the Canadians, an' don't forgit it either.'

It was arguing with a stone trying to convince Otto that Canada owed allegiance to the Crown. Surely the intense loyalty of the Canadians to the Mother Country was not

going to prove another myth? I sought arguments to show how necessary Britain was to Canada.

'Suppose Canada was invaded by some first-class power?' I asked Otto, while the others listened in silence. 'Where is your navy? Where is your army? You have only nine million of a population and you've got half a continent to defend. You are at the mercy of the Russians, the Japs, and the Americans . . . Any one of them could wipe you out of existence if you stood apart from Britain.'

By the way they stared at me I sensed that arguments of this type were unpopular in Winnipeg — they dispelled illusions.

'Pah, that's a lotta bunkum,' snorted Otto. 'What could a bunch of Bolshie Bohunks do? . . . An' what'd the Americans want to fight us for? They've got a darn sight too much capital sunk in this country to start trouble.'

'You can argue as you like,' I said, shrugging my shoulders, 'but you depend on your immunity from attack on the fact that the British army and navy is lying in the background. What do you think the rest of the world leaves you in peace for? . . . Because they're afraid of you? . . . You think it ludicrous that the Americans might invade you one day, but it's not any more ludicrous than Germany invading Belgium, and it's only a hundred years anyway since you were at war with U.S.A.'

Otto cut me short when I was beginning to enjoy myself.

'Say,' he grated, 'an' what d'ya think your dinky lil' British navy could do anyway? . . . The Yanks'd blow you into the air as the Germans did at Jutland.'

'Aw shucks,' shouted Max at his brother during the uproar which followed. 'What d'you know about the War and the British navy? . . . You give me a pain in the neck.'

That was only the first of many arguments with Otto, who, despising all things British, never wearied of drawing my attention to the decline and imminent fall of the Empire. Those arguments with him, carried on in that high-pitched incisive voice of his, had mentally the stimulating effect of a plunge into icy water. Otto set me thinking about Canadians in a new way; not as a race of simple backwoodsmen looking to Britain for support and advice, much as a child looks to its

mother, but as an independent nation, thinking out and solving its own problems in its own way. I also discovered that if my parish-pump ideas about Canada were laughable to Canadians, their ideas about Britain were just as absurd to me. Everybody in Britain was a pauper, living on the 'dole', which was a Communistic institution imported from Moscow, not a form of insurance towards which workers made weekly contributions, as I tried in vain to point out. No one worked in Britain; the country was bankrupt and on the verge of revolution; there was no trade carried on, and all its overseas markets had vanished!

The Reimers in common with the small bourgeoisie the world over, appeared to believe that workmen were a sub-human race, born lazy, 'a crowd of bums out for all they could grab' from their overlords, the men with capital; they had no right to have opinions on anything, 'their business was to work like blazes for what their employers cared to give them and keep their mouths shut'; 'all this socialistic clap-trap was the bunk'.

'But,' I objected one evening, when Mr. Reimer was holding forth on the General Strike which had terrorized the pillars of Winnipeg's economic life a year or two previously. 'If there was no "dole" in Britain there would be a revolution. You can't just turn people out into the streets because you've got no work to offer them, and then expect them to die quietly of starvation . . . Men aren't made that way . . . And,' I went on, thinking of the loyalty and cheerfulness of the men on the extra-gang at Mactavish and ignoring the sudden chilling of the atmosphere, 'they are human beings just like business men, with the same right to live. If Capital can't solve the unemployment problem then it must expect to be smashed up, that's all I've got to say.'

'That's socialistic talk,' said Mr. Reimer icily, 'and we don't stand for that sort of thing in Winnipeg. We know what to do with men who talk like that out here.' His tone of voice made me realize that discussions of a free nature, such as I had loved to have with 'varsity student friends at home, was considered the worst possible form in my present society.

Tortured by doubts and questionings, my mind was in a constant turmoil; I was being forced to study life at a new angle, against my will. What was this existence of ours anyway? What was it all about? What was its purpose? Was there any reason in it, or did we have to put the reason in ourselves? The more one thought about life, the more complex it all became! Why should great music have such a profound effect upon me? Why did people bend all their faculties on 'getting ahead of the other fellow', and talk so enthusiastically of the 'almighty dollar', while it was the spectacle of people living thus which absorbed me? Worried and perplexed, I found myself shut out from the common life by my inability to procure a situation.

§ X I I I

There were several pianoforte solos among the gramophone records in the sitting-room; Liszt's 'Second Hungarian Rhapsody', played by Percy Grainger, who appeared in Winnipeg that autumn, and one of the marvellously brilliant Godowsky playing Liszt's 'Rigoletto Paraphrase,' and a transcription of the 'Fire-music' from Wagner's *Valkyrie*. I played these records over and over, wondering at the virtuosity of the players.

Max's interest in music was re-awakened. He began to bring new player-rolls into the house. He liked Beethoven and Liszt but could not abide Schumann and Chopin 'Études'. 'Aw shucks, there's no tune in the darn things . . . Just a lotta row, they give me a pain in the neck,' he declared.

While Max sat at the player-piano, Otto and I played draughts. 'Have you got a set of chessmen?' I asked when I grew tired of the game. A set was produced. 'I know nothin' about this game,' said Otto when I proceeded to teach him the moves, 'but I guess I can lick you at this as well as checkers.'

Otto hated defeat in any form. Chess appealed to his keen mathematical intellect. He bought a book and cut the chess problems out of the newspapers, and night after night sat hunched over the chess board alone.

'Come on, an' I'll beat you now, you Old Country boob,' he challenged me at last. It was worth while being vanquished to hear Otto's howl of triumph.

But on the nights when I was too depressed to take an interest in anything it was Max who placed a friendly hand on my shoulder and cried, 'Cheer up, Jim, the worst is yet to come, the first seven years are the worst. Aw, but you ain't dead yet. Wait, boy, till your luck changes . . . Gee! you'll be rollin' along in your Packard an' won't you just laugh at all this! . . . Don't I know just how you feel about things! Haven't I gone through it myself? . . . Gee! the times I've given up hope an' sat smokin' in a pool-room, feelin' like doin' myself in because there wasn't a darn thing to look forward to . . . Come on, old socks, let's go along to the Carnegie Library an' get a coupla books out.'

I thought Max the finest fellow on earth.

§ x i v

A week dragged past without the appearance of a single pupil in reply to my advertisements then one evening during supper the front door bell rang.

'It's a young man to see you,' said Natalie.

I hurried into the sitting-room. A neatly dressed youth about seventeen years of age stood twiddling a brown felt hat nervously in his hands.

'I-um-ah,' he fumbled, looking at me with surprise and embarrassment written all over his face. 'I wanted to see Mr. Walker, the music-teacher,' he managed to struggle out with at last.

'I am Mr. Walker,' I said, brightening up at the prospect of a pupil.

'Oh!' said the flustered youth evading my eyes. 'I — er — saw your ad. in the *Free Press*, and . . . thought I'd . . . like to learn piano . . . but,' he gulped as he hurried towards the door and made his escape, 'I guess I'd better talk it over with my dad first.'

I stared after him as he dashed away. The only explanation I could think of, was that he had been expecting to see a man with grey hair and a professorial appearance.

§ x v

Now and then I spent an afternoon with Ralph and Owen, usually ending up in a cinema or variety theatre. On Friday evenings we went in a noisy bunch to the public baths for a swim, mixed bathing being permitted on that one night.

Max, Otto, Clif, Owen, and Ralph, and Natalie and her friend Madeline were all expert swimmers, as were the other slim, brown-skinned Winnipegians I saw there. Though an indifferent swimmer I loved diving, and got more fun from the baths than the little inexpensive cinema we went on to afterwards.

§ x v i

H.R.H. the Prince of Wales had come and gone, the sole topic of conversation for a week. The things that mattered in Winnipeg during that period were, who he had danced with, spoken to, what he said and they said, what he wore, looked like, ate, drank, and smoked, who had been omitted and who had been invited to the public reception held in his honour.

I learned, as I listened to the gossip at mealtimes about these invitations and the undercurrents of jealousy and spite beneath the surface of Winnipeg's social life, that the city was as class-conscious and snobbish as one of Anthony Trollope's cathedral cities.

But what concerned me about the Prince of Wales's visit to Winnipeg, was not the flutter he had caused in a thousand drawing-rooms, but the fact that he had received a deputation of stranded Harvesters from the Immigration Hall and promised to do what he could for them.

Mr. Reimer told me that hundreds of Harvesters were being sent home as a result of this interview with H.R.H. 'Why not

go along to the Immigration Hall and see what they've got to suggest?' he said, when I expressed the opinion that I would be better off in Scotland where I knew so many people.

§ x v i i

Ralph and Owen accompanied me to the Immigration Hall, which was situated in Maple Street, beside the C.P.R. depot.

Portage Avenue was thronged with sunburnt Harvesters in from the Western wheatfields. Ralph and I talked to a number of them while Owen made some inquiries at the C.P.R. booking-office. The men we spoke to related the fine experiences they had had, and how they had earned five, six, and even seven dollars a day. They spoke gleefully of booking passages back to Scotland and England.

I felt desperate when I reached the Immigration Hall. The Canadians' dread of the winter, which was already in the air at nights, and the constant reminders of the impossibility of securing work until the Spring, combined with newspaper stories of sadistic farmers in lonely regions treating young boys and girls in atrocious ways, terrified me. I felt trapped. I had read of one young Harvester who had been discovered on the verge of starvation with his legs so badly frostbitten that it had been necessary to amputate them.

Ragged Harvesters passed in and out of the high, square, dirty-grey Immigration Hall. I stopped one.

'Ye'd better go tae the office on the next flair,' he replied, when I told him my business. 'Ye'll see a queue waitin' at a door on the left when ye get tae the landin'. Go in there an' juist tell the ——s that ye want to be sent hame.'

Owen and Ralph followed me upstairs, and, while I waited, engaged some of the men we found there in conversation.

§ x v i i i

When my turn to enter the office came I went in with parched throat and thumping heart. The room was small,

divided into two by a long narrow polished counter. Seated behind this counter was a big raw-boned youth with flaring red hair; on either side of him sat a young sophisticated stenographer.

'What d'you want?' said the red-haired clerk, nodding me into the chair facing him. He glanced sideways at one of the stenographers. The tone of his voice and the girl's laugh stung me. What a vile situation to find oneself in!

Flushing hotly, I explained my position, after recapitulating my experiences since landing at Quebec.

'Well, an' what d'you expect us to do?' the man demanded harshly.

'That's what I've come here to find out,' I replied.

'Well, we can do nothing,' he flung at me with a brutal laugh.

'But you'll have to,' I cried indignantly, realizing that nothing would come of this interview. 'I want to be sent back to Scotland with the other men who have been stranded. I can't sleep out in the streets in this weather . . . Something's got to be done!'

'You can do what you like, it's got nothing to do with me,' said the red-haired clerk nonchalantly, lolling back to cast self-satisfied looks at now one and then the other of the stenographers who seemed to find the whole business a good joke.

In a towering passion I jumped up. 'But it is your business,' I cried. 'You damned Emigration people bring us out here with your lying propaganda. The Golden West!' I sneered. 'You're just a set of bloody liars,' I shouted. Trembling with rage, behind which was weeks of despair, I slammed the door behind me with all my strength.

'Shut up, I don't want to hear you . . . It's easy enough to talk about what doesn't concern you,' I snarled at Owen who began a lecture on diplomacy on our way back to Portage Avenue.

That was the last time I ever saw Owen. A day or two later he went to Toronto, after a final quarrel with Ralph.

§ x i x

Realizing the hopelessness of trying to get pupils, I returned to the streets and the dreary dispiriting search for work. I spent much time with Ralph; yarning in his digs, walking in the streets, accompanying him to Eaton's Store on shopping expeditions, visiting 'bucket-shops' in Main Street, where spidery Jews spun fantastic tales of the wealth that would spring the day after to-morrow from the oil-fields and gold mines whose shares they dangled before our hypnotized eyes.

Ralph still frequented his Italian café. He posed there as a medical student; the fat proprietor in consequence had become still more obsequious and confidential, while his pale pimply-faced son sought, with dark-ringed eyes, Ralph's professional advice on the subject of masturbation.

§ x x

One grey, dour morning, while shivering among a hundred other unemployed on the steps of the employees' entrance to Eaton's Stores, waiting for the door to open, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and looking round, found myself face to face with Ned of the 'extra-gang'.

Delightedly I shook hands with him, noting his new winter overcoat and the aura of prosperity and happiness which encircled him. 'How did you all get on after you left me?' I asked.

'Oh, we didnae stey long on the construction-gang. Clive an' I got a job harvestin' at six dollars a day. When we feenished wi' the first fairm we travelled on wi' the threshin' outfit frae one place tae another, till the snaw came an' feenished us.'

'And are you going to stay in Winnipeg?'

'Naw, I'm gaun back tae Glesca'. I juist thocht I'd hae a look round Winnipeg an' see if there was any chance o' gettin' somethin' tae dae before I left. But frae whit I've seen I don't

think there's mony jobs fleeing aboot this toon . . . Still, ye never ken yer luck . . . I've got twa hunner dollars in ma pooch, an' I'm awa' back hame tae mairry the girl noo. I've got whit I wantit oot o' Canada an' I'm no' grumblin'.'

When the doors were opened, I lost Ned in the mad scramble to the employment office. As usual, I had no luck, so went on as was my habit, to study the Help Wanted columns in the Reimers' office. Five weeks had gone by since I had been discharged from the hospital and I was as far from getting a job as ever! It was dreadful!

'I've joined a motor-school,' said Ralph, when I called on him afterwards. 'They guarantee you a job when you've completed the course . . . You should join, Jim. The whole course costs forty dollars and we would be together all day.'

'But forty dollars is all the money I've got in the bank,' I objected.

'Ach well, what does it matter,' persisted Ralph. 'Forty dollars wouldn't keep you alive very long if the Reimers chucked you out. You may as well spend it that way and get some good out of it. If you spend it on this motor-course we'll both be in the same boat and have nothing between us.'

I made up my mind at once. Sink or swim! I would gamble my little capital on a course of motor-engineering! Perfectly mad of course! One couldn't learn in a few weeks what required long years of apprenticeship at the bench and in the repair-shop, backed by courses of night-classes and laborious study of text-books, but at least it was doing something other than ranging indefinitely through a nightmare of streets, questing for work which was not there!

§ x x 1

I left Ralph at his breakfast, called at the bank, and then made my way to the motor-school. The man I interviewed in the office was a great hulking Bohunk; a young man with shoulders as broad as a barn door; smartly dressed, glib of tongue, and evasive of eye. His flow of persuasive talk about

the future of the automobile industry, the rosy prospects for skilled drivers and mechanics and so on, sounded too highly polished and carefully worked out to be anything but mere patter, learned and repeated parrot fashion.

Well, I walk into the thing with my eyes open, I told myself, as I handed over my forty dollars. Nothing would come of it! Life was just a bloody mess!

'When do I begin!' I asked.

'Whenever you like,' said the Bohunk with a subtle change of voice and attitude. 'You can start right now. I'll show you up to the laboratory and introduce you to Professor Grasmere.'

I followed the clerk up a flight of steep narrow stairs and into a wide, lofty room. Benches ran round the four walls and occupied the centre of the floor on them sections of gear-boxes, cylinder heads, crank-cases, and transmission gear were displayed. One wall was taken up by ignition and lighting-sets; the sparking plugs, and bulbs representing headlights, sidelights, and rearlights, fixed on blackboards.

About a dozen youths in overalls and shabby suits were busied about the benches.

'Here's a new man for you, Professor,' said my guide to the droll figure who approached us. Professor Grasmere was middle-aged, of medium height, and thin as a lath; his clothes looked as if he had slept in a haystack for weeks; his collar was a dirty limp rag, his tie like a piece of knotted string of uncertain colour. But it was the air of distraction and weariness which gave such a comic appearance to the whole ensemble. Professor Grasmere evidently considered himself one sane man in a world of lunatics. He chewed tobacco, looked me up and down, shook his head wearily, ejected a brown stream of tobacco juice into a sand-box, and muttered, 'My Gawd, another of them.'

Leading me to a bench, he said in sepulchral tones, 'If you think you can learn motor-engineering in six weeks, Gawd help you . . . I'll do what I can, but you go down on your knees every night an' pray on Gawd to give you some divine assistance, for you'll need it.' Now, you can start wiring this Buick ignition an' lighting set.' He whipped the wires from

the sparking plugs, bulbs, and distributor-cap on one of the blackboards and left me to puzzle things out for myself.

As I fiddled about with wires, trying them on this and that brass terminal, memories of motor-cycle breakdowns on lonely moorland roads came back to me; cold wet winds blew in my face, curlews and plover wheeled and called above me, thin ribbons of road twisted among the hills of my native country. How far off that life was now! I was awakened from my day-dream by Ralph resting his chin on my shoulder to peer at my amateurish attempts at wiring.

§ X X I I

At lunch time Mr. Reimer raised his eyebrows when I related my doings of the morning. His glum look was expressive.

'Well, Jim,' breathed Mrs. Reimer after a dead silence, 'you never know, it might be the first step towards owning your own car.'

It was Otto who expressed the unspoken opinion of them all.

'You crazy goof,' he piped derisively, casting his eyes upwards in despair. 'Why didn't you tell us you were thinkin' about joinin' that school. We could've put you wise. Don't you know that's a bum show? Gosh! who'd've thought you'd've been such a simp . . . Oh, you poor sucker!'

'Aw, darn it all,' objected Max, his crestfallen look giving way to his usual optimistic grin. 'You never know . . . Somethin' might come of it.'

§ X X I I I

Until the end of November, by which time the snow had come, the temperature had fallen to about ten degrees above zero, and the streets had acquired a surface of polished ice, I attended the motor-school and wrestled with the intricacies of gear-boxes, differentials, magnetos, carburettors, cam-

shafts, timing-wheels, and all the other multifarious technicalities of the automobile.

My new interests kept me from brooding over my position. Ralph had a number of good technical books, and, as he loved engineering as I did music, he liked nothing better than sitting for hours in the little back room he now occupied, trying to clear up technical points for me.

The more I learned, the more I realized how impossible it was, with the time at my disposal, to understand all the ins and outs of a car sufficiently well to be able to drive in the crowded streets of Winnipeg, care for it in the garage afterwards, and do whatever running repairs were necessary.

However, I enjoyed Professor Grasmere's lectures. He was such a droll Dickensian character. When he came into the little lecture hall in the mornings and mounted the rostrum, there was an instant silence. Before opening his mouth to breathe a fervent 'Gawd', he treated us to a pitying shake of the head. We were hopeless little insects crawling innocently about the edge of a volcanic civilization! We were to be pitied and prayed over, for Gawd alone knew what was going to happen to us!

But though the most unconventional of lecturers, Professor Grasmere's knowledge of automobiles was profound, dating back to the first De-Dions and Daimlers, and there was nothing he would not do for a student who came to him for advice. His lectures were punctuated with bawdy stories and picturesque oaths, all rolled out in deep solemn tones, and, though we might be rolling about in paroxysms of laughter, our professor never relaxed the gravity of his facial expression.

No violinist loved his Stradivarius more than our professor did his internal combustion engines. He exhorted us to be unsparing of lubricating oil and grease should Gawd ever intercede on our behalf and provide us with a truck or car to care for, and drew grotesque word-pictures of what irate bosses did to drivers who 'seized up' engines.

'Now see here, boys,' he said once. 'They say the days of miracles are over, but if the Lord should take it into his head to work one on your behalf, and you find yourself with a job,

the very first thing you do, is take a spanner an' go over every nut in the car. If you don't, you might find yourself steering into Eaton's window on Portage Avenue, or watching your wheels come off in a traffic-jam, or maybe finding your gear-box lying on the road behind you . . . I know that when you were in short pants an' your mothers loved you, that your Sunday school teacher told you all about loving your neighbours and forgiving the guy that does you down. But when you go out into the crool hard world, and walk into a job where the guy before you had a grudge against his boss, you're just as likely to find the sump full of iron-filings and water instead of lubricating oil, as to find that he's been praying that Gawd forgives his boss.'

§ x x i v

Meanwhile Max's friend Clif had thrown up his job in Winnipeg and had gone to Chicago, lured there by the glowing advertisements of some technical college. According to his letters, he was having a struggle, earning his board by washing dishes and waiting at tables while studying telegraphy.

The temperature fell slowly. Night after night, Mr. Reimer, Max, Otto, and I, played a card game called Five Hundred.

Ralph had relations in Winnipeg in comfortable circumstances. I was never invited to their place. There was a slim, dark-haired cousin who studied singing; Natalie and she became friendly and spent their evenings with Ralph. Max disliked Ralph intensely and seldom spoke in his presence. He could not abide Ralph's handsome face, with its cynical mocking smile, and his secretive nature, with its lack of warmth and enthusiasm.

§ x x v

Winnipeg led an active musical life. The art was blossoming out where a generation before there had been little else but prairie and the howling of Redskins and coyotes. There were musical clubs and thriving teachers. I attended the Sunday

evening concerts given by Percy Manning, a popular conductor, at the Metropolitan cinema. Nomadic virtuosi gave recitals, among them Vladimir de Pachmann, to hear whom I spent two of my few remaining dollars; and once Verbruggen, who had been known to musical circles in Glasgow, visited the city with his Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. Max told me wireless broadcasting was of little account, 'no-one bothered about it'. He had a crystal-set with earphones, which he only used when 'a big political speech was being broadcast'.

Mrs. Reimer was a Philistine. She loved her 'bridge' and Mah-Jong parties and her golf, and liked to talk about the Old Country with me, but she abhorred music.

'I heard about a boy the other day who's thrown up a good job in an office, to go in for this highbrow music stuff,' she told me one evening. 'He's got eight pupils who pay him a dollar a lesson, and he's paying seven dollars a lesson to some teacher. He must be crazy. This music stuff is all bunk! What use is it to anybody? If people would only settle down to some good hard work it would do them a lot more good.'

§ x x v i

Only a few days after this outburst, Mr. and Mrs. Reimer went to dine with friends who had a daughter who was something of a prodigy on the violin. She was having lessons with a young Polish virtuoso, newly arrived from Europe, and who had given a recital the week before in New York. Mrs. Reimer treated me to a detailed account of the little girl's career up to the present; the scholarships she had won, and the money which had been lavished on her training.

'My word, but that fellow could play the fiddle,' said Mr. Reimer, when they returned from the dinner.

'Oh, I could see nothing in it,' declared his wife irritably. 'I'm sure I don't know what they make all the fuss about him for. That crazy highbrow stuff gives me a headache. It's just a lot of nonsense as far as I am concerned.'

Next day, Mr. Reimer told me during lunch that Mrs. Krause had called on him. 'She said that this new teacher insists on her daughter having an accompanist of her own to practise with and play for her at concerts. I told her there was a young man living with us who might be the very man they were looking for.'

'My word, Jim, this is the chance of a lifetime for you,' cried Mrs. Reimer excitedly. 'If you get in with those folks your name is made.'

I had never played a pianoforte accompaniment in my life. It was useless telling the Reimers, who knew nothing about music, that accompanying was an art which required years of experience to acquire proficiency!

'How old is the girl?' I asked.

'She's about twelve or thirteen,' replied Mr. Reimer. 'But say, she can play! And this teacher of hers is going to be one of the big men of the musical world out here.'

It made me wretched when I saw how delighted my friends were at this news. They expected so much of me! They had stood by me all those weeks . . . Oh, it was sickening!

I had never met a musician of any standing before, but I had read and heard much about the temperamental outbursts of the great. Beethoven smashing a chair in fury and rushing out of a house because a pupil displeased him, was one anecdote which I could not banish from my mind.

§ x x v i i

'Now, Jim, play up all you know and let them see what you can do,' exhorted Mrs. Reimer, when, a mere bundle of nerves, I set off the following afternoon with a bulky volume of Beethoven Sonatas and a slim book of Bach 'Inventions' under my arm.

Having but a few blocks to go, I loitered on the way, afraid of the ordeal before me. The sky was leaden; the naked trunks and branches of trees were black against the snow-covered ground. The house was much bigger than the Reimers',

standing a little apart from its neighbours. The street was deserted and wrapped in a wintry silence. Several times I walked up and down in the snow, trying to summon up courage to ring the doorbell.

Conquering an impulse to fly, I marched up to the door at last. A domestic showed me into a room on the ground floor and went off to apprise the household of my arrival.

It was a small room, and the way in which it was furnished suggested that those who used it cared more for the cultivation of their minds than their material surroundings. A shabby couch, a table littered with music; a bookcase; an old-fashioned upright piano beside the single window with its heavy curtains.

'Not much of a piano, anyway,' I thought, examining the fretwork panels, brass candlesticks, and old yellowed keys.

While I was endeavouring to throw off the choky feeling of nervousness which oppressed me, a young girl burst into the room. She was big and sturdily built for her years, with a shock of dark bobbed hair, and very dark eyes.

'You are going to play for me, aren't you?' she said excitedly.

'Well, I hope so,' I stammered. Wondering where the rest of the household was I glanced at the music I had laid on the table and added. 'What would you like me to play?'

'We'll try over this concerto first,' the girl replied, lifting a piece of music from the bundle on top of the piano. 'We haven't finished lunch yet, so you can have a run over it till I come back. But have you had your own lunch?' she asked anxiously.

'Oh yes,' I smiled. The idea of the Reimers lunching at three o'clock in the afternoon amused me; there was a vast difference between a business and an artistic household.

Left alone, I scanned the first few pages of the Max Bruch concerto anxiously. There was only one way to tackle this stuff, and that was to plough through it in my usual hell-for-leather style, concentrating on the spirit rather than the letter of the composition. At the beginning of the first movement were some big fortissimo chords. Playing them in a fiery way, I waded into the composition.

'You play well,' said the little girl, as she tuned her violin on her return. She started off at a tremendous pace. I suddenly felt happy and was swept into the empyrean. What did a few wrong notes matter, so long as I hung on to the piece and we kept together? When we finished we discussed the piece excitedly, as musicians do when pleased with a performance.

By jove, if only I could get this job and have this wonderful child to practise with every day!

After leaving the room for a moment, the little violinist returned and said, 'Now we'll try over Sarasate's "Gipsy Dances"'. Do you know them?

I shook my head. 'This is all sight-reading to me,' I replied. 'And I'm afraid I'm a pretty poor sight-reader.'

'Oh,' she protested vehemently, 'but you ought to hear some of the accompanists in Winnipeg . . . So wooden and dreadful.'

The 'Gipsy Dances' were another mad scramble for me. I felt, though glorying in the whirling mass of sound we created in that little room, that I was making a hash of the accompaniment.

'Oh, we must play through this again,' she cried delightedly, when we finished.

When she left the room again, I realized that we had an unseen audience and felt my nervousness return.

'You are a pianist, so you must know this,' the little violinist said, placing Chopin's E flat Nocturne before me.

To my utter bewilderment and despair, I found that playing the Nocturne as a piano solo and as an accompaniment were two entirely different things. In my agitation I lost the place; my fingers seemed all thumbs; with horror I listened to my fumbling.

'You're not following me,' cried the violinist, stamping one foot vigorously to mark the tempo. But the conception I had of the piece was so utterly at variance with hers that I lost all control of the thing.

'Oh, why don't you follow me,' she cried petulantly, 'I can never get a pianist to follow me properly,' she said, when we tried it over for a second time.

'What do you intend to do in Winnipeg?' she asked in a friendly way as she put away her violin.

'I've been trying to get pupils,' I said, still miserable because of the way I had played the last piece, 'but it's terribly difficult.'

'Do you still take lessons?' she inquired.

'No, I can't afford lessons now,' I said, telling myself that my days of music-lessons were gone for ever.

'You want to get a job in a cinema,' she urged. 'You get good money in cinemas, and you would be able to take lessons with a good teacher then.'

'I don't think I could play the things they want in cinemas,' I said, shaking my head dejectedly. 'You need a sledge-hammer touch, and you've got to be able to play jazz.'

'Oh, but you could do it easily,' she cried.

Knowing my own limitations, I shook my head. The musical language of jazz was like Chinese to me!

While the little violinist was talking a man slipped silently into the room. As I grasped the slender white hand offered by the small slight figure with its pale sensitive face and dark glowing eyes, I realized that this was the virtuoso I had heard so much about and felt as awkward and ill at ease as is possible to imagine.

'You play . . . very well,' he said quietly, hesitating over his words as if struggling with the English language. 'How old . . . are you?'

'I am twenty,' I replied, blushing like any schoolgirl.

'Twenty . . . twenty,' he echoed, gazing at me with a smile. 'Oh, so young . . . it seem . . . that it is . . . long . . . time . . . since I was . . . twenty.' He gave a little laugh.

Feeling that I ought to make some witty reply, but stricken dumb with nervousness, I grinned inanely, inwardly cursing my gawkiness.

'What . . . is it . . . that you . . . like to do?' he asked after a pause, 'Play . . . piano solo . . . or teach?'

Between my flustered state and his imperfect English, which became rather involved, I failed to grasp what followed, catching only the words, 'Staying with friends in Winnipeg', and 'travelling'.

I heard no more about the job as accompanist to the little violinist; the Reimers were most discreet about the whole business. A year later I learned that Mrs. Reimer had written to my people in Scotland to say that the virtuoso had said I had neither 'presence' or 'personality', otherwise he would have taken me with him when he continued his tour of America.

§ x x v i i i

Despondently I returned to the motor-school. Another bitter disappointment! All the joy seemed to be draining out of my life. Even the cinema was losing its potency as a mental drug. Winter was hounding more and more men into Winnipeg and the prospects of getting work diminished daily.

God! what am I to do? I agonized a thousand times a day, while walking to and from the motor-school, with bright sunshine sparkling on powdery snow, children skating merrily on every vacant lot; sleighs jingling past, driven by men in bright-hued mackinaws and fur caps; the world so crisp and bright, and everybody happy save myself.

In the evenings I no longer played cards, talked, or argued. I sat huddled up in an arm-chair, staring unseeingly at the walls, the pattern of the carpet, the pages of a book, my mind circling round and round the one problem — how to escape from the scene of all those defeats which had created my present neurotic state. Where could I go? To walk about the streets at nights with the temperature at zero would be suicidal, and I was much too fond of life to think of putting an end to it! The Immigration people had refused to have anything to do with me? All those people who kept telling me to 'look in again next week' had no work to offer, or lied and gave jobs to others! Civilization had no use for me, that was clear enough! But what was I to do? I couldn't go on staying with the Reimers, God no! Oh, it was a hellish mess!

Ralph and I gave up the motor-school. A cousin of his had appeared from nowhere; a stoutish youth from Edinburgh, with a passion for pubs and relating amorous adventures past

and present. I loathed Ralph's cousin, his red, fleshy, lascivious face, and the grossness of his mind repelled me. He seemed to bring out the worst side of Ralph too.

The desire to fly from Winnipeg became an obsession. If I couldn't realise my ambitions of becoming a concert-pianist, what did it matter what I did or where I went?

With Ralph I sought out the warmth of Eaton's Store, with its crowded floors, lifts, and escalators, or sat with him in his dingy little back room, talking over our position, and unburdening our minds of many things, with the frankness of those in a desperate situation.

During the Municipal elections I earned six dollars as a poll-clerk. Then Madeline, Natalie's friend, asked me if I would give her piano lessons. Though her neurasthenic aunt regarded artists, musicians, and poets as unclean bums, dangerous to have around houses where there were attractive nieces, I regarded those first lessons I ever gave with the seriousness of a young parson delivering his first sermons.

§ x x i x

One evening I read a volume from the bookcase in the Reimers' tiny sitting-room. It carried me back into an Eighteenth Century Canada; a Canada of trackless forests and vast unexplored wastes; a Canada peopled by daring Frenchmen and Scots who voyaged thousands of miles in frail canoes, with as little thought as I took in boarding a street car for the centre of Winnipeg.

Before finishing the book I had resolved to leave the city and this twentieth century civilization which had no use for me. If those early 'voyageurs' could live through the hardships of months of travel in the wilderness, then surely I could survive a winter on a farm? In any case it would be better dying in a blizzard than dragging on a life of mental torture in Winnipeg.

When I broached the subject of going out to the Bush, Mrs. Reimer told me the breadman had worked in a lumber-

camp the previous winter. 'He told me he could get nothing else to do,' she said. 'He said he wasn't a strong man, but he had to do it for his wife and children. He made enough to keep himself and family till the spring. I don't like the idea of you going out to the Bush, I'd rather see you in an office in the city . . . But if the breadman could make something out of it, I guess it can't be all that bad out in the woods.'

§ x x x

Next morning I called on Ralph. He was still in bed, 'feeling sick'. I asked him if he would go to the Bush with me.

'Who the hell wants to work in a lumber-camp,' he snarled. 'Christ, of all the daft —s I've ever met, you're the daftest. What the hell do you know about felling trees, anyway?'

'Well, damn it all,' I retorted, 'I'm going to clear out of Winnipeg. I can't go on like this any longer.'

'I get my mother to send me money,' he went on. 'You should write home to your old man and get him to send you money.'

'How can I do that with things as they are at home?' I cried indignantly.

'Ach, away tae hell,' sneered Ralph. 'People don't go bankrupt without having plenty laid away in a safe corner. Your old man will have feathered his nest all right . . . Don't come the hard-up stuff with me; we're not all as green as we're cabbage looking . . . You can go to your bloody lumber-camp or where the hell you like, but I know my mother wouldn't like the idea of me working in a place like that . . . Anyway I'm a damned sight more particular what I do . . . A bloody navy! . . . Ach, it's all you're fit for.'

I trembled with fury. The swine knew I wouldn't strike him while lying in bed!

'Hi, do you know that you're mad?'

'Mad?' I echoed in amazement.

'Yes, mad . . . You heard what I said first time.' Ralph's eyes glittered with hatred.

'What are you talking about?' I demanded, so taken by surprise that my voice almost failed me.

'And don't think I'm the only one who thinks you're mad,' he grated savagely. 'Owen says the same, and so do the Reimers.'

'Do they say that about me behind my back?' I gasped in horror.

'Of course,' he snorted. 'Everybody that knows you says the same. Christ! . . . you and your bloody music! . . . Everybody laughs at you behind your back.'

'Oh, because I play the piano I'm mad?'

'All people that play the piano are mad,' sneered Ralph.

'Well, if that's what you clever, sane, materialistic folk think,' I snorted disdainfully, 'you're welcome to your rotten thoughts . . . You are the sort of people who want to kill all that is beautiful in the world. You want the world to be one huge factory, and everybody in it like yourself, a slave to machinery . . . You want to kill all art! . . . Bah, you are the ones that are mad.'

Ralph, in the few minutes I remained in his room, revealed a side of his nature which I could hardly credit, so full was it of hatred and venomous spite. Tired of insulting me he attacked my family and laughed at my almost uncontrollable rage.

I rushed out into the wintry streets and walked blindly, until the tumult within me had calmed down. Was this really true? Was I really stranded in Winnipeg, and had Ralph really said all those terrible things? Oh, it was only too true; it was no wild dream! God, I was going to get out of this damned city at once!

§ x x x I

I told the Reimers that night that I was determined to try farming again as I was chary of going to the Bush without a comrade. Mr. Reimer said at once that he had a friend in the Immigration Office who might be of some service in getting me fixed up on a farm.

'I don't like that guy Roscoe, he's too deep for me,' said Max, when I told him I had quarrelled with Ralph. 'Gee, but you sure have had a tough time . . . If only you had come out when things were boomin' . . . Gosh, Jim, there's nothin' I'd like better, than to see you fixed up right here in Winnipeg with a good job. Think of the dandy ole times we could have together.'

§ x x x i i

Mr. Reimer's friend proved to be a short, round-shouldered clerk, about forty years of age. He wore a grey-green tweed suit and horn-rimmed spectacles; his worried expression seemed habitual as it had channelled deep furrows in his face. I found him in the general office on the ground floor; a spacious place with large scale maps hanging round the walls.

'Oh yes, Mr. Walker,' said Greysuit extending his hand. 'Mr. Reimer told me all about you. Just come through to my desk and we'll soon fix you up on a farm.' Telling me what a fine fellow Mr. Reimer was, he led me to a desk littered with maps and letters.

'The wages aren't much in the winter months,' he began, motioning me into a seat and rummaging through his letters. 'But the work is light . . . there's practically nothing to do on a farm in winter. Some of the bachelors out West offer board, tobacco, and stamps, with no work at all, just for the sake of having company. But I've got two letters here, both of them offering wages.' Greysuit found the letters he was looking for and pulled out a map. 'Here's a fellow at Russell offering fifteen dollars a month . . . that's an exceptionally good wage for this time of year; you'll get nothing better than that.'

'Where's Russell?' I asked. 'Is it out on the open prairie?'

He pointed to a spot on the map near the Saskatchewan border.

'Where is the other farm?' I asked after a digression on the topography of Western Canada. 'I want a place near hills and woods, I don't want to live on the prairie if I can possibly avoid it.'

'This other man offers ten dollars a month?' said Greysuit, reading over the second letter.

'What is the country like around his place?'

'What does it matter what the country looks like,' Greysuit snapped with a gesture of impatience.

'It certainly doesn't matter to you,' I replied grimly. 'But it does to me . . . remember I am the one that's going to live on the farm.'

Pulling out another map Greysuit showed me the location of the second farm. It lay among the woods between Rainy River and Fort Francis. The very place! Near the Lake-of-the-Woods, where all the big lumber-camps were! If the farm turned out to be like the others I could try lumbering!

'I'll take the job on Rainy River,' I said at once.

'All right, Mr. Walker,' said Greysuit briskly. 'But still, I'd rather see you take the job at fifteen dollars, even if it is on the prairie!'

'When will this fellow want me to begin work?' I asked.

'There's a train at five o'clock this evening,' said Greysuit, looking at a time-table. You leave from the C.N.R. depot. Now I'll get your railroad ticket . . . The Dominion Government pays your railroad fare. I'll wire Mr. Jackson, your employer, at once, and let him know when to expect you . . . He seems a nice fellow from his letter. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Walker, that I envy you going out into the woods. If I was ten years younger I would be going in your place, away from all this worrying office work. You don't realize how lucky you are in getting this chance to live a clean healthy open-air life.'

My head in the air, my railroad ticket in my pocket, I walked along Main Street. Only a few hours of hurried preparation and Winnipeg would belong to the past! God! but it was good to be alive, and know that to-morrow I wouldn't be trailing hopelessly about these streets tortured by the demon of unemployment! Happiness bubbled up within me. I felt like nodding familiarly to all the well-dressed men, and raising my hat to all the pretty girls in Portage Avenue.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

THE train hissed, clanked, and panted out of the depot, leaving me dazed by the sudden stillness. I looked up and down the platform as the other passengers dispersed rapidly. A youngish, clean-shaven man standing under the oil-lamp burning above the door of the ticket-office hurried towards me. 'Are you Mr. Walker from Winnipeg?' asked the stranger in a pleasant cultured voice. 'I am Mr. Jackson, your new employer,' he smiled as we shook hands. 'Where are your belongings? You must be dead tired after your long journey, but we've got a seven mile drive ahead of us, so we'd best hustle.'

Thinking that Mr. Jackson seemed a decent sort, I piled my cabin-trunk and suitcase with his assistance, into the rear of a sleigh to which was harnessed a big black stallion.

We took our seats, tucked a heavy bearskin rug around our knees, and, with a pleasant jingling of harness and tinkle of sleigh bells, moved off.

I studied my employer covertly. His face was strong and full of character, with severe lines between the eyes; he was of medium height.

The village, consisting of one long straggling street, was built on the north bank of Rainy River, which at this point swept round in a magnificent curve. We talked about various things as we glided past well-built bungalows, shuttered stores, two-storied bank buildings, and the usual frame shanties, all silent under the full moon, as it was long past midnight, and casting jet black shadows on the glittering snow.

The village fell behind. The novelty of my first sleigh ride, and the enchanted appearance of the white moonlit world, against which romantic pines stood so still and black, wove a spell round me. It was surely a delightful dream, and I would

wake up shortly to all the horrors of unemployment and the streets of Winnipeg!

We glided past clearings containing silent log houses with darkened windows. The road, winding in and out among the trees, and up and down little steep hillocks, gave an occasional glimpse of the ice-bound river gleaming in the moonlight. Clouds of vapour gushed from the horse's nostrils; the wind created by our motion had an exhilarating tonic quality which made me feel like bursting into song.

My employer, asking my christian name, and saying that I must call him Fred, as Canada was a democratic country, began to talk of farming.

'After all,' he said, 'Canada is a farming country. Everybody who comes out here tries farming sooner or later. Even if you have no intention of taking over a farm later on, the experience is valuable in a country practically dependent on the land. We're not like the prairie farmers who concentrate on growing wheat, however. In the woods here, every acre has to be cleared of trees and the stumps dragged out, a frightful toil. We go in for mixed farming . . . a "quarter section" is as much as we can run. We keep pigs and cattle, grow hay and Timothy grass for the lumber camps, who employ hundreds of teams of horses. In fact, if it wasn't for the lumber-camps there would be little use our being here at all . . . they are practically the only market we've got for our produce.'

The horse, of its own accord, turned off the road and led us through a gateway and across the snow towards a cluster of log buildings built on the river bank. 'Well, Jim, we're home now,' said Fred.

Feeling sleepy and longing for the comfort of a bed, I helped to unharness the horse, my fingers fumbling awkwardly with stiff leather and buckles which resisted my attempts to undo them. Fred led the stallion into the stable, I following, holding up a lighted lantern.

The stable was warm, smelling of sweet-scented hay and manure; a Clydesdale and a Perchin turned their heads towards us, then continued nuzzling their mangers in search

of stray stalks of hay. Though born and bred in the town, there was something vaguely familiar in the earthiness of it all, the close proximity to animals and remoteness from the world of offices and shops. After all, there were generations and generations of farmers and fisher folk in my blood, who were my forefathers before the Industrial Revolution built the towns of Lowland Scotland!

§ 11

I was awakened by the rattle of dishes and the chatter of children. 'Hullo, Jim, had a good sleep?' said Fred as he passed into the kitchen. 'We let you sleep on this morning after your long journey yesterday.'

I had been given a shake-down on a couch in the living-room. As I dressed I looked curiously around. The first thing to catch my eye was an upright piano against one wall. Two thick pine trunks supported the roof in the middle, between them sat a big cannon-ball stove, with a tin heating pipe leading from it to the ceiling. A flight of stairs ran up the wall on my right to the floor above; in one corner a grandfather clock ticked loudly; the rough boarded floor was uncarpeted and the log walls half lined with beaver board; the chairs looked as if they had been picked up cheap at an auction sale. It was a Spartan looking place altogether!

I went into the kitchen. Mrs. Jackson was bending over a cooking stove frying bacon. Fred's wife was big, blonde, and fresh complexioned, and must have been exceptionally pretty as a girl. Like her husband, she spoke in a pleasant cultured voice. I liked her immediately, and, as I washed in the tin basin beside the stove, under the fixed stares of the two children at the table, I thought, as I answered Mrs. Jackson's questions about the shops in Winnipeg with their Christmas decorations, of the sullen family on the first farm Will and I had worked on.

Breakfast was a pleasant meal. Newspapers were few and far between on Fred's farm, and wireless broadcasting a mere

rumour, so I had many questions about the outside world to answer as best I could.

I felt the eyes of the two children, a boy and a girl, aged nine and eight years respectively, boring through me all the time. The fixity of their wide-open eyes disconcerted me. I was no sentimental lover of children, and was frankly relieved when they were bundled off to school, which, their mother said, was more than a mile away.

'I'll show you round the place now and explain everything,' said Fred at last, rising to his feet and knocking out his pipe on the edge of the stove, while his wife went to the 'phone and began calling up her neighbours.

The kitchen door opened on a big veranda, screened with mosquito netting. The wall was hung with haunches of beef, sides of pork, plucked fowls and turkeys.

'Oh, we don't need to worry about cold storage,' laughed Fred, when I asked if the meat kept fresh hanging there. 'That stuff will keep till spring. I'm going to line the rest of the living room with this when I get time,' he added, waving a hand towards a number of sheets of beaver-board. 'Now that you're here I hope to get a lot of things done that I've never had time for . . . That's the rub in running a farm on your own, you never get a chance of making your house comfortable to live in; all the time and energy goes in attending to the work outside.'

We went towards the long log building to the left of the house, which, with a group of smaller frame huts built in a line, formed a right angle, with a manure heap in the middle. Eagerly I took in my surroundings; the stretch of cleared land along the Canadian bank of Rainy River; across the field on my right, the roadway, then more cleared ground, then the pine forest stretching towards Hudson Bay.

The snow glittered in the morning sunshine; the sky was intensely blue; every object stood out vividly; there was a hard bright loveliness in the scene. Expanding my chest and drawing in the cold sparkling air in great gulps, I rejoiced in my youth and strength.

The buildings were old and tumbledown. Fred was going

to build a new barn in the spring. The gravel for the foundations he was going to obtain from a gravel-pit on the American side of the river, and, as this meant him being away most of the day, I was to take charge of the stock.

'I'll help you for a day or two,' he said, throwing open the door of the byre. 'There's not much to learn; you'll soon pick it up. Can you milk cows?'

'No,' I said, following him into the dark, warm, odiferous interior, where five cows and half a dozen young steers rattled chains as they turned curious eyes on us.

'Well, I'll soon teach you,' went on Fred. 'I've already done the milking and fed the calves. We'll begin by feeding the cattle and horses, and then I'll leave you to clean out the byre and stable.'

Armed with pitchforks, we scrambled into the loft above and tossed into the narrow passage between the byre and stable, what seemed to me an enormous quantity of hay. When the animals were fed I cleaned out the byre and stable as told, wheeling the manure out into the yard in a barrow literally falling to bits with age and hard use.

The next task was feeding the pigs. Fred showed me his grain store, and scooping out a quantity of what he called 'oat-chop' from a bin, he mixed it with skimmed milk and kitchen scraps in pails, talking all the time about pigs and their care. There was a score of young pigs in a shed with a cement floor. When the door was thrown open and the animals scented the food they screamed in a nerve-racking way and leaped up over one another in the attempt to scale the wooden barrier. Lastly, three huge sows were fed. They were allowed to root about the yard, and slept at the foot of a strawstack all the year round.

Inwardly, I bubbled over with enthusiasm. The sun, the sparkling snow, the pure air, the peaceful, unhurried life around me, all combined to drive the poison of despair from my mind. Despite the twenty odd degrees of frost, I felt warm; my activities kept my blood circulating and my whole body tingled with a delightful sensation of physical well-being. I was going to love this farm life! My imagination pictured

myself owner of a 'quarter-section' in the woods. Hewing down trees! Wrestling with nature! Living in a log shanty built with my own hands in glorious solitude! Ah! this was the real Canada at last!

§ III

'And how do you think you're going to like farming?' Mrs. Jackson asked, as we drank tea at the end of the midday meal.

'I think it's going to be fine,' I enthused.

'Do you really think you would like to stay here and take up a "quarter section" and "batch it" alone?' she exclaimed, in tones of mingled amusement and incredulity. 'No, Jim, I can't see you acting the pioneer at all,' she said, looking at her husband, who puffed at his pipe and smiled.

'Oh, I don't know,' he cried. 'Look at yourself. If anyone had told you six years ago that you would be sitting here, in the kitchen of this farm, with a farmer for a husband, would you have believed them?'

'No, I certainly would not,' she laughed.

'We'll make a farmer of Jim all right,' declared Fred . . . 'But,' he went on, rising to his feet, 'let's get a hustle on. We've got a cow to kill this afternoon.'

'Do you kill your own animals?' I asked, experiencing a sinking feeling within.

'Why, of course,' replied Fred, making for the door. 'A farmer can't afford to go running into town looking for a butcher every time he wants a cow killed or a pig stuck.'

It was a ghastly business leading the poor brute out of the byre into the barn away from the other animals. When I passed the halter through an iron ring on the floor and dragged the cow to its knees, while Fred stepped back and swung an axe determinedly, I felt like a murderer. Instinctively I shut my eyes. A dull thud and a groan. No, I could never be a farmer if it meant this kind of thing!

I watched Fred make a deep incision in the unconscious

animal's throat. The warm red blood flowed out over the floor of the barn. The cow gave a last shudder. And to think that our civilization was founded on this! Without food there could be no life — no cities — no art!

Smelling blood, the sows rushed in screaming. We slammed the door in their snouts and, accompanied by their banging and shrieking outside, set to work on the carcass. The hide was stripped off and the animal opened up to remove the viscera.

'We'll stop now,' laughed Fred, as the stomach full of half digested hay was accidentally punctured, and the stench of the escaping gas sent us gasping against the walls holding our noses. Opening the door, Fred threw the cow's liver and kidneys to the screaming pigs. 'We don't care to eat offal' he said. 'The heart is the only part of the entrails we eat.'

Again we pitched hay down from the loft and fed the cattle and horses. The sun had gone down behind the pine-tops ere this; the cold grey haze on the horizon had turned to crimson, faded to purple, then merged into the blue-black of a star-spangled night.

§ 1 v

When we stamped into the warm lamp-lit kitchen I was pleasantly tired and ferociously hungry. I told myself I had a good day's work behind me.

The children, home from school, were relating in excited voices the epic events of the day. They began to stare again. There was no escape from their unblinking eyes.

Over the supper table Fred and his wife discussed the local news which Mrs. Jackson had received over the 'phone.

'I don't know what I'd do without the 'phone,' she told me. 'It's a "party-line" and half a dozen of us can listen in at once, and talk to each other.'

The kitchen was large, with roughly planed and white-washed log walls. I sat at the head of the table facing Mrs. Jackson. Through the uncurtained window at her back I

had a view of the barn and outhouses. Beneath the window sat a milk separator, with the telephone desk in a corner beside it. Fred faced the children, his back to the warmth of the cooking stove which also had a tin heating pipe leading up to the room above. A clothes-horse draped with towels and drying clothes, stood at one end of the stove; beside it was a big tin bath and a box filled with billets of pine wood, which, as it burned, filled the room with a sweet resinous perfume. Near the window at my back stood an old-fashioned dresser with a badly cracked mirror back. The rough planks underfoot were bare; the passage into the living-room had neither door nor curtains. A cheap oil-lamp with a cracked funnel, stood in the centre of the table, flooding the room with a soft yellow light. Our shadows caricatured our slightest movement on the floor, walls, and ceiling.

Fred told me his story. He had been six years on the farm, which was sixty years old. 'I was in an accountant's office in Winnipeg, but I thought I could do better for myself on a farm of my own than working for someone else in an office. When a man gets to thirty years of age, as I was then, he starts thinking seriously about his future and wants to be independent. I was sixteen years old when I came out to Canada. I went straight out to Saskatchewan and got a job with a farmer. My word, he was a regular old terror! The prairie around this farm was covered with white stones and boulders, geologists say they have been left there by glacial action; however, this old tartar of a Scotchman set me picking stones in his fields and piling them into heaps . . . cairns, he called them. I wasn't strong and didn't get much to eat . . . in fact, I was half-starved there. I can remember as clearly as if it was yesterday, the dreadful heat of the sun, and how the labour of bending down and carrying those big white stones to the heaps used to make me think I would die before the day came to an end. But I was determined not to give in and let the old grouch see that he'd beaten me, so I stuck it out for a year before going back to Winnipeg. When I got to the city I studied book-keeping at night-classes and did what odd jobs I could until I got into an office.'

Mrs. Jackson had been a school-teacher before marriage. As I listened to them, I wondered what had possessed them to bury themselves in the woods of Ontario, away from the suburban life they seemed more fitted for.

§ v

When Fred and I went out after supper, the silence and absolute stillness of the razor-edged night air was profound. Our shadows in the light of the lanterns were grotesquely elongated on the pallid snow.

In the byre I sat on a three-legged stool with a pail between my legs and attempted to squeeze milk from a cow's udder according to Fred's instructions. By the time I was finished with my cow, Fred had milked the other three. 'Oh, you'll get into it in no time,' he said encouragingly, when I apologized for my awkwardness.

We carried the milk back to the kitchen where Fred explained the use of the separator. Afterwards we went out again with pails of skimmed milk, to feed three little calves. Then the young pigs had to be fed again. When I lifted up my lantern and watched them feeding, a panting, scuffling, leaping, squirming mass of infantile pork, somehow I found myself thinking of struggling humanity in great cities.

'Now, we've got to lay in a supply of wood for the evening and to-morrow morning,' said Fred, laying a log, with my assistance, along a crazy-legged sawing-horse.

Taking an end each of the long cross-cut saw and facing one another across the pine log, we set to work. The sharp teeth of the saw rasped loudly in the still, frozen air; and, in the light of the newly-arisen moon, the sawdust spurted in tiny white jets.

'You can fill the pails at the pump now, while I split this wood,' said Fred, calling a halt. 'Take them into the kitchen and that's us finished for to-day.'

With the long day behind me, I entered the living-room. A wave of heat from the cannon-ball stove met me; its top was almost red hot. A large table-lamp had been lit. Mrs. Jackson was seated at the table on the left, assisting the children with their homework. 'Well, Jim,' she said, looking up with a smile, 'are you ready for bed after your first day as a farmer's boy?'

'Not so bad as all that,' I laughed, instinctively moving over to the piano.

'Do you play?' asked Mrs. Jackson, as I turned over the music lying on top of the instrument.

'A little,' I replied, playing a minor chord or two softly.

'Do you really play?' came Fred's eager voice from the doorway. They pleaded with me to play something, no matter how simple.

Examining the music, I found the little 'Minuet in G' of Beethoven's. I began to play. My hands were still numb with cold and I stumbled in consequence, but in spite of this they seemed entranced.

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Jackson tremulously, after a dead silence. 'You can have no conception of what it means to us to hear good music again . . . We never hear any music.' The fact that they were so near to tears brought the tears to my own eyes.

'My trunk is half full of music,' I said. 'But I never dreamed that people in the woods would care to listen to the kind of music I love.'

'I say, dear!' cried Fred. 'This is going to be fine. My word!' he declared enthusiastically. 'It isn't every farmer in Canada who gets a hired-man to do the chores during the day, then entertain him with classical music at night.'

For an hour I played — Beethoven, Chopin, and Greig. A silent audience of two, in primitive surroundings, far removed from the palaces of Vienna, the salons of Paris, and the villa on the Hardanger Fjord, where the composers had moved and conceived the pieces I played.

I was shown up to my bedroom at nine o'clock. A small, half camceiled room, with bare, rough-hewn log walls. The one uncurtained window faced west; a tiny segment of mirror hung from a nail on one side of it. All the room held was an old box filled with musty-smelling books; my bed, an old door laid on two trestles with mattress and blankets on top; a rag of carpet, and one broken-backed chair. My cabin-trunk and suitcase, plastered with brightly-hued half torn labels — Quebec, Pitlochry, Oban, Tobermory — were the only splashes of colour in the room.

When I undressed and blew out the little oil-lamp, the stars, glittering icily, looked in through the window at me. Never had I known such absolute silence! My eyes straying to the labels on my trunk, set me thinking of other strange beds I had slept in, lulled by the breaking of waves on flat stretches of moonlit sand, or the crying of night birds over windy moorlands, or the night sounds of some great city. Like the falling of a curtain on a stage scene, sleep blotted out a confusion of thoughts and memories.

§ V I I

The week wore on. The temperature remained a comfortable ten degrees above zero; the sun shone brilliantly by day, the moon by night. Christmas drew near.

I rose every morning about seven o'clock, when the first grey of dawn was chasing the stars from the sky. While Fred lit the kitchen stove I fed the cattle and horses. Over heavy woollen underclothing I wore my breeches, two pairs of golf-stockings and rubber boots with leather uppers; a thick white sweater and tweed jacket; a fur cap on my head; Fred had supplied me with a pair of leather and a pair of woollen mittens which I wore one on top of the other.

I remained a painfully slow milker.

'If I've got to do the milking myself,' grumbled Fred at length, 'you'll have to learn to groom and harness the horses.'

My first blunder was committed on the Friday morning. 'Say!' Fred flung at me, coming up with an angry expression on his face and thrusting half a pailful of grain under my nose. 'What the dickens have you been feeding the pigs with chicken food for? . . . I just saved this out of the trough in time.'

'Didn't you say I had to give them that stuff?' I replied.

'You might have known that grain was for the chickens,' he said angrily, throwing the contents of the pail into a bin. 'That's a fortnight's supply gone west,' he added savagely.

'I'm very sorry,' I said haughtily, stalking off to complete my morning's work.

However, I cleaned out byres, stables, and pig-styes, pumped water from the well, helped to saw and chop wood, fed animals, and enjoyed the novelty of it all.

Never seeing a soul save Fred, his wife, and two children with their unblinking stares, I was thrown back on my own thoughts for company. By jove! What would the hockey fellows say if they could see me now? I asked myself on Saturday afternoon, as I pitched hay preparatory to feeding the cattle. Past games rose before me. Muddy rain-soaked pitches, the clack of ball on stick, the running figures, shouts of the players and straggling line of onlookers. How many times had I entered an opposing 'circle' in a fever of excitement, to drive at the ball with all my might, determined to score or annihilate the goalkeeper, only to hear the umpire's imperious whistle and fatal cry of 'sticks'?

At nights I practised Beethoven sonatas. They too aroused memories and longings which had to be stifled. Winnipeg, strangely enough, soon faded from memory. I had been too worried and unhappy there to wish to keep it alive in my thoughts.

I grew calmer, happier, more confident in myself, during those first few days on the farm. Cities! Pah! I was a fool to imagine one could be happy leading a hot-house existence in a city! Only here, among the woods, in close contact with nature itself, was peace and quiet and contentment to be found!

§ VIII

On Saturday evening, after the children had been bathed and sent wailing to bed, I was left alone in the kitchen with the tin bath full of hot water. By the time I had finished with the tub, had shaved, trimmed the little military moustache which had been such a source of irritation to Mr. Reimer, and had sleeked my dark hair back till it shone like polished ice, I felt more like my pre-Canadian self than the 'hired-man'.

I went into the living-room. Saturday night, seven miles to the village, and heaven knows how many to the nearest cinema! Ah well! What did cinemas and streets of shops matter anyway?

The only sound in the house was the ticking of the grandfather clock, the scratching of Fred's pen as he sat at the table busy with account books, and the crackling of wood in the stove. Both Fred and his wife, who sat beside the table sewing, looked up when I entered, and seemed disposed to talk. Fred, laying down his pen, told me the account books belonged to a company formed by a group of farmers in the neighbourhood to purchase a threshing machine, and thereby save hundreds of dollars a year. Fred was the honorary secretary and treasurer.

He told me that an improved farm like his own would cost about five thousand dollars. A man could start with a few hundred dollars and borrow capital, but he would have a bitter struggle dragging up tree-stumps and clearing off his mortgage. Fred described the local system of bartering labour. 'When one of us wants to do something that requires a number of men,' he said, 'we don't go into town and hire labour. We call on our neighbours and get them to come along and work for nothing . . . lend so many days' labour which has to be repaid as required. It's a system which saves us a great deal of money and trouble . . . running into town and hiring men, wages, stamps on cheques, and so on . . . And it enables a man with no capital to get things done.'

'But,' I exclaimed, 'that is pure Communism.'

'Well, I wouldn't let anyone else hear you say that,' laughed Fred. 'Communism isn't a popular word in Canada; people might misunderstand you. But it's really what it amounts to. We very seldom see money, and we've got to rely on one another for a great number of things.'

In bed afterwards, I turned Fred's words over and over in my mind. Bartering labour! Never see money! Living so far out of the world that one may as well be on the moon! Five and seven cents a pound for his beef and pork, when it was retailed in Winnipeg at from twenty to thirty cents per pound! Where did the Emigration posters come in? Could one spend a whole lifetime in this manner? How Mrs. Jackson talked after I played that Chopin 'Nocturne' . . . about it recalling all the things she had put behind her when she had forsaken the city for the farm! . . .

Weariness blurred my thoughts. It was delicious to stretch out one's limbs and feel sleep creeping over one!

§ 1 x

Next day, Sunday or no Sunday, the animals had to be tended. Fred and his stolid eight-year-old son, assisted me with the 'chores', which I learnt was the American term for the work I had been doing. The Jacksons did not go to church, though Mrs. Jackson read to the children from the Bible. My ideas on conventional Christianity being in a nebulous state, after witnessing what the God of the Church had done to Europe during and after the War, I wasn't even interested enough to ask if there was a church near.

During the day I penned eight long letters, all written with boyish exuberance and dwelling on the picturesque side of my experiences. In the intervals of this literary labour I stretched my legs around the farm buildings. The weather remained as clear as ever. Rainy River fascinated me by the fact that the fabulously wealthy U.S.A. lay across its wide frozen surface. Several hundred yards in breadth, and frozen two feet deep, save for an open space half a mile to the west where

the current ran swiftly, the river wound in great lazy sweeps between steep banks clothed with scattered pines. There were two farms on the American side; one opposite Fred's, the other further along, beside the open stretch of water; a child had been born there on the night of my arrival. Not a living soul could I see anywhere. I seemed to have all this profoundly silent, sparkling white world to myself.

§ x

During the midday meal I asked Fred why the farms were built on the river bank instead of beside the road.

The river had been the natural highway before the C.N.R. railroad was built, he said, and everything was carried on little steamboats, so naturally people built as close to the river as possible. 'There are old sourdoughs in the village who tell all sorts of interesting yarns about the early days,' Fred said. 'My word, but they did rough it! You ought to hear some of their stories of hardships.'

Fred went on to talk of the 'voyageurs' and Hudson Bay traders who had paddled canoes along Rainy River in the eighteenth century; he had the local history at his finger-tips.

At supper time, in a joking way I doubted the existence of wild animals in Canada, having seen nothing wilder than a prairie chicken since I came to the country.

'Oh, there are wild animals in the woods all right,' replied Fred. 'Not here, there are too many farms for a bear's comfort, but there are wolves . . . I heard one howling the other night. The worst thing we've had since we came here,' he added with a laugh, 'was a skunk crossing the yard. Phew! It was weeks before the air was pure again.'

When the chores were done for that day, I amused myself in the warm lamp-lit living-room with a large atlas of the North American continent.

Fred had spent two or three winters in lumber-camps around Fort Francis, to earn a little capital when he had first taken the farm. He drew little word pictures of the roughness

of the life. 'I remember how the men laughed at me the first night they saw me putting on a suit of pyjamas,' he said. 'But I paid no attention to them, and they left me in peace after a time. Poor fellows, I did feel sorry for them. Most of them had never known the comfort of a home.'

Life was grim and earnest with Fred. His tone of voice was usually serious; he seemed to brood much, it was his wife I noticed who buoyed him up with her optimism.

§ x i

Monday was Christmas Eve. On holiday, the children yelled and shouted about the kitchen till the veins stood out on their necks. It was a pleasure to get out among the animals after breakfast. Noisy brats, a good spanking would do them good! 'Children,' I concluded, after trying to analyse my antipathy towards them, 'must be an acquired taste.'

Every day Fred found a new task for me. An iron boiler was set up beside the pig-house for boiling turnips to add to their fodder, necessitating lighting fires twice a day. A rusty slicing machine stood in the dungeon-like basement of the shed the turnips were stored in. I was set slicing turnips twice a day. I loathed that dark cellar with its low roof. Every time I crawled into the darkness to procure a fresh supply of turnips, I bumped my head against a beam.

All that was fastidious in my nature revolted at another task. Fred talked of coming blizzards and forty below zero winds, then told me to plaster the joints of the log-walled byre with manure, to make the place wind-proof.

I nursed my enthusiasm carefully and told myself that it was good fun. But the vision of the 'quarter-section' and the little shack of my own began to fade.

That morning Paul Van Hulst, our nearest neighbour, appeared, the first fresh face I had seen since my arrival. He had come over to help Fred remove the bristles from some hogs which had been killed before my appearance on the

scene. Paul was a Pennsylvanian Dutchman, small and neatly built, with an intelligent face, a toothbrush moustache, and merrily twinkling eyes. He laughed and joked like a schoolboy on holiday. From the bizarre ideas I had gathered about foreigners in Scotland I had imagined Dutchmen to be huge lumbering clods of men.

'Well Jim,' he cried breezily, as he shook hands with me. 'And how do you like being in the backwoods among us rough-necks? . . . You're coming along to my place for your Christmas dinner. I hear you're a great pianist, and I don't mind telling you that my wife and I are looking forward to a real musical treat.'

While moving about the yard doing chores, I saw them plunging a dead hog in and out of a barrel of boiling water, 'Say, have you heard this one?' rang out Paul's voice every few minutes. Gusty laughter followed the *sotto voce* recital of yarn after yarn.

In the afternoon Fred went off to the village with a box-sleigh filled with haunches of beef, bales of pressed hay, eggs, butter, and the carcasses of several hogs. He had a letter from the Reimers for me when he returned.

'There you are, Jim,' he called out as he drove into the yard. 'I've brought you a nice new red-painted barrow for your Christmas. My word,' he laughed, as we lifted the barrow out of the sleigh, 'You'll be able to clean out the stables in record time now.'

We drove to the school shack that evening. It was the first time Mrs. Jackson had been more than a dozen paces from the house since my arrival. 'I can't bear the cold,' she told me. 'I just live for the summer time.'

What between the bright moonlight, glittering snow, pine-trees, and the merry tinkle of sleigh bells on the thin frozen air, the short journey was like a delightful dream.

A stove glowed in the school shack; round the brightly decorated Christmas tree crowded noisy excited children; everybody talked at once. Around the doorway the men smoked pipes and discussed cattle and market prices. The women chattered the simple gossip of the neighbourhood, and,

with one eye on their children, prepared tea and unwrapped parcels of sandwiches, cake, and pie.

Paul Van Hulst introduced me to his wife, a plump, rosy-cheeked woman, with bright eyes and a sunny disposition. They had three children, the eldest a pale, thin, sensitive looking boy of thirteen.

As we glided back through the moonlit forest, I thought over the little festive scene in the school shack. How utterly isolated were those folk from all that seemed to make life worth living — streets of lighted shops, theatres, cafés, crowds, colour, and movement! Live all my life in the woods and never see anything gayer than that scene in the hut? No, no, a thousand times no!

§ X I I

Christmas day dawned; the sky was grey and threatened snow; a wind, the first since my arrival, whined softly about the house. Being a holiday, I lay abed till eight o'clock, staring out of the window and thinking that this was the first Christmas I had ever spent among strangers. The eagerness with which I had hung up my stocking as a child! The gathered clan of aunts and cousins from Glasgow! The noise and laughter and glorious gorges! When I thought of Scotland and the past, an intense feeling of despair and loneliness crept over me. Tears coursed down my cheeks, infuriating me. Hang it all, I was behaving like a kid! Christmas was just a lot of sentimental bunk!

I rose and dressed quickly, shivering with the below zero temperature of the room. Well, at any rate I was living, not dragging out a half-asleep existence in a half-dead office! Why, I was luckier than any of those fellows I had left at home; I was living in queer places with all sorts of unexpected things cropping up when least expected!

Peering into the wedge of cracked mirror beside the window, I examined myself. I had a week's beard; my cheeks were rosy red, my eyes bright and clear. I felt as strong as a

horse, and the aching void under my belt spoke of the tremendous appetite farm-life was giving me. I laughed at my momentary weakness and went downstairs.

§ XIII

'Merry Christmas,' cried Fred jovially, when he came into the kitchen and found me on my knees trying to get the refractory stove alight. Upstairs the kiddies screamed with delight and called to their mother to 'come and see what Santa Claus had brought them'.

We hurried through the chores, and, immediately after breakfast set out across the snowy fields to Paul's farm; a two-story log house, built on the river bank like Fred's, with sheds, stable, and byre, straggling away from it towards the road.

While the women prepared the dinner, I wandered about the outhouses with Fred and our host, looking at stock. Paul and Fred went into the histories of various breeds of pigs, cows, and horses. I tried to take an intelligent interest in their conversation. But try as I did, I failed to convince myself that the subject of discussion was of more importance to me than being able to play the piano with virtuosity.

Though I dipped into Fred's farming books, read his farming journals, and talked with him about the care of stock and raising of crops, something inside me kept saying that it was no good; that this was not the work appointed for me in this world; that I had still to find that work; that I would know no peace of mind until I did so.

'Gol darn it, but I wish those women in there would get a hustle on, I feel as empty as a drum,' groaned Paul again and again, as a noble odour of roast turkey, plum-pudding, and mince-pie, wafted from the kitchen, set our mouths watering.

At last we were called inside.

'Come on boys, you've got to finish this turkey or my wife'll be serving it up for the next week,' declared Paul as he seized the carving knife.

It was a god-like feast. By the end of it conversation had dried up, the turkey was little more than a skeleton, and all that remained of the plum-pudding was a few brown scraps and isolated currants.

'Gee, I'm about all in,' gasped Paul, unbuttoning his waistcoat with a long sigh.

There was a long pause during which everyone sat sighing and grinning in a foolish way, then conversation began to liven up again. I was struck by the difference between the two families. 'Oh, I like farm-life,' said Paul. 'It's a good easy kind of life; I've never known any other. My wife and I come from the shores of Lake Erie . . . It's more like in your own country there; the farms are close to the towns and cities . . . We're going back there in the summer; a relation has died and left us a fruit-farm.'

As they talked about leaving Rainy River, I compared Fred and Paul. Paul had several generations of residence in America in his blood, unlike Fred. Paul was easy in speech and manner; nothing dynamic and strained about him; he didn't talk of 'pep' and 'hustle' and 'beating the other fellow to it', like the Reimers. He liked the life, he was industrious and 'kept things going', but, so long as he got a good living out of farm-life he 'didn't care about killing himself in trying to build a bigger bank balance than his neighbour'.

When I thought of Fred's worrying and brooding about not 'getting on', I saw that there was a vast mental gulf between a man bred to the land, and one who leaves an office desk and the highly artificial life of the town. As a townsman, I could see behind Fred's occasional moments of despair. Surrounded by crowds of fellow creatures, a man has always a certain sense of his own importance; but faced with the primeval forces of nature and deprived of all light and gaiety, a city man is reduced to a frightened little boy shut up in a dark cellar.

Paul and his wife had much to ask me about Scotland; I had forgotten that I was the 'hired man', when Fred said abruptly, 'Well, Jim, you'd best be getting back and feeding the stock'.

§ x i v

Perhaps I had overeaten, but, as I trudged back across the snow under the grey bitter sky, to feed the animals, Fred's short 'come-on-get-a-move-on' tone rankled in my mind. I had more than a fair share of the stubborn pride of the Scot. Did Fred think that a Scot was a Bohunk? Did he think that he could purchase a man body and soul for ten dollars a month, and that it didn't matter two hoots how you spoke to him?

In vain I reasoned with myself, but there was something about Fred which aroused an antipathy in me; an indefinable attitude of superiority adopted towards me was resented by my whole nature.

Feeding the cattle, and concluding that it was impossible to live with a man in such isolation without all sorts of grievances, real and imaginary, cropping up, and that the only antidote was fresh faces and new voices, I went back to the Van Hulsts for supper, having worked off my resentment. Having also made up my mind not to settle in this part of the woods, I felt happier.

§ x v

It was pleasant in the yellow lamp-light; waves of heat radiated from the stove; the fragrance of the burning pine logs and the aroma of the cigars the men smoked mingled with the odour of coffee and fruit. I felt comfortable and drowsy; the voices of the children sounded faintly from the kitchen.

Mrs. Van Hulst talked of life in Eastern Canada and of music studies before her marriage and then begged me to play, 'just to let an old woman hear some good music again'.

Going to the piano I turned over a pile of music, wondering what the musical taste of an Ontarian farmer's wife would be like. There were volumes of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Mozart.

The piano was in fair tune. Through the window, the world looked as white and frozen and lonely as the moon. I began playing the Chopin 'Nocturne in A flat'. The group at the table sat as still as statues. The music stirred me; I felt lifted out of my surroundings. My thoughts were of Europe; of the frail Polish genius who had penned the notes before me. How sad it all was! How they suffered during their lifetime — all those composers, artists, and poets, who mean so much to us now! Chopin in Poland, Chopin in Paris, in Majorca, nursed by George Sand; Chopin dragging his weary body from one concert hall to another, coughing his life out and dying far from his beloved Poland! I could visualize it all, and being young, I felt sorry for Chopin, myself, and everybody else.

When I had exhausted my scanty repertoire I rejoined the group at the table. Now thoroughly worked up and bubbling over with enthusiasm, I went into rhapsodies, describing Wagner's 'Ring of the Nibelung', and the great singers and pianists I had heard in the past. I forgot that I was only a 'hired man' at ten dollars a month. I was blissfully happy.

'Say Jim,' said Paul in an undertone, as we shook hands before parting that night, 'if you are ever up against it and in need of help in any way, look on me as your friend. We're going East in the summer . . . Here's the address, an' if you ever find yourself in my part of the country look on our place as your home'.

The world seemed a little less lonely, the pines a little less sombre, and the wind a little less searing, as we plodded homewards with lighted lanterns in our hands.

§ x v i

Next afternoon, Fred hitched the two draught horses to the box-sleigh, pitched a couple of cant hooks and an axe on board, then told me to jump up beside him. 'We're going to haul logs,' he explained, as we made for the outskirts of the forest.

On reaching the edge of the forest, the horses were unhitched from the sleigh. Fred led the Clydesdale in among the trees,

leaving me to follow with the Perchin, which pricked up its ears and stood stock still when I said 'Gee up'. 'Gee-up, old boy,' I repeated, as the horse turned its head and cocked an inquiring eye at me. Hang it all, didn't the brute understand English?

'Come on, what's the matter with you; standing there as if we had all day to waste,' said Fred impatiently, when he hurried back to see what I was up to.

'I can't get the blessed brute to budge,' I replied in perplexity, saying 'Gee-up' again.

'The animal doesn't understand you,' said Fred. 'You don't tell a horse to 'gee-up' in Canada. If you want it to move forward, you say "giddup".' The horse began to move as he spoke. 'Then when you want it to go to the right you say "gee", and for the left you say "haw".'

He watched me start and stop the horse, then make it incline to the left and right. 'Come on now,' he snapped, 'we've got to hustle and get things done a bit quicker.'

Fred's domineering tone nettled me.

The trees had already been felled. Trimming them of branches, we fastened chains round them and the horses dragged them into the open. I was slow and awkward at this unaccustomed work. Trimming a log was a simple matter, but my numbed hands fumbled with the chain, and Fred's angry comments on my slowness did little to aid me. When I had hitched a log to my horse and cried to it to move on, I stumbled in the deep snow when I ran forward to catch the bridle. As I tried to guide the log between the trees my face was scratched on lower branches, and when I looked back in unguarded moments the horse brushed me against the boles of trees, knocking the breath from my body. To an experienced woodsman it was child's play, but to me exhausting, dangerous work.

'Come on, get a move on,' Fred kept shouting.

'Damn you,' I muttered, every time he turned a red scowling face towards me.

Once Fred's Clydesdale galloped off stablewards while his back was turned for an instant. 'Atta-boy, run you blighter,'

I laughed with glee, as I watched him run shouting after it, 'I hope it beats you to the stable.'

Holding my horse firmly by the head I awaited his return.

Fred's face was white with passion.

'What are you standing there doing nothing for?' he shouted violently as he came up.

'I was waiting to see if you were going to catch the horse or not,' I answered shortly.

'Couldn't you have carried on without me?' he raged. 'I didn't hire you to stand about doing nothing all day.'

Glaring angrily at my employer, I made no reply; grinding my teeth with rage, I led my horse back into the wood.

'All right, Mr. Jackson,' I fumed inwardly. 'You and I are beginning to know one another a little better. I'm just the "hired-man" . . . hired for the noble sum of ten dollars a month . . . about what a newsboy would get at home for going round with morning papers. All right Mr. Jackson, you treat me like a Bohunk, and you'll get exactly ten dollars worth of work out of me and no more . . . And you can fire me any time you like . . . the sooner the better. But you won't get me giving up the job and letting you win this darned game . . . no dashed fear.'

'Practically nothing to do on a farm at this time of the year' the chap in the Immigration office had said! God, it was funny!

§ x v i i

The next week crawled past. The logs were hauled from the forest and piled in the yard, and one day a big Swede arrived from the village with a gasoline saw. Paul came over, and in the course of a morning and afternoon, the logs were sawn up into small lengths and piled into a great pyramid. The temperature fell a few degrees every day. A little snow drifted down; the sun was blotted out during the day and the sky seemed roofed with lead. And morning, noon, and night, were the everlasting chores.

Mrs. Jackson had been sick for a sight of Winnipeg for years.

Every mealtime she talked about visiting her sister in that city, until Fred at length told her we would 'batch it' together till her return, and gave her permission to go.

'Where do you spend your summer holidays?' I asked, with the innocence of a greenhorn, during one of those discussions.

'Holidays!' echoed Fred. He laughed shortly and looked at his wife. 'The only holiday we've had in the last six years was one day last year, when the Van Hulsts and my wife and I hired a car for a day and drove to Fort Francis for a picnic . . . A farm isn't like an office you know. A business man can lock the door of his office and go off anywhere he likes for a fortnight in summer; but if I lock the doors of my byre and stable and walk off for a fortnight, I can't expect to come back and find that my animals have been feeding and watering themselves. No Jim, take it from me, a farmer's work is never done . . . unless he is a rich man and can afford lots of hired help, he's got to stick on the farm all the time.'

'Lord! what a life,' I thought. Be a farmer! Never move from one spot all your life, and see a new face about once in a blue moon! Gosh! it was like being exiled to Siberia . . . like being a character in one of those Russian novels!

'I used to have to do the chores,' Mrs. Jackson told me once. 'Oh, I did hate that job . . . I'm so glad I'm free of it now.' She dreaded harvest time. 'It's terrible then,' she said, 'baking and cooking for a horde of hungry men . . . I thought I would die the first harvest we had here; cooking over a red hot stove in the hottest part of the year.'

My dream of a log cabin in the woods faded daily. In its place I visualized a hobo existence; roaming over the western lands in warm sunshine; seeing the Rocky Mountains and all the places that caught my imagination when I pored over the atlas at nights.

§ XVIII

New Year's Day found the temperature about twenty degrees below zero. At nine o'clock the night before I had gone to bed, visualizing the scene in my native town at mid-

night — church bells ringing in the New Year, sirens blowing, crowds of revellers at the Cross singing 'Auld Lang Syne' in uncertain voices, men staggering from group to group, whisky flask in hand, pressing all and sundry to drink or be damned.

Here was the silence of the grave. The sky dour and grey. The whole world held in a frozen vice. Cut off completely from the world, from the society of even the dullest of village clods! When I thought of the eager companionship of my intimates at home, I cursed the snow, the silent brooding pines, and the animals I had to attend to. Where was the pleasure in such a life as this? Was life not too brief and precious a thing to waste as a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water? Why, even the smallest of my father's apprentices would turn up his nose at the work I was doing now! God! to be educated, and to have to live like this among brute beasts! . . . Oh, the whole business was farcical!

So cold was the handle of the pitchfork when I started forking hay before breakfast, that it seared me through my mittens, numbing my fingers so that I was forced to drop it every other minute and swing my arms vigorously to restore the circulation.

'Well, it looks as though winter has started now,' said Fred at breakfast time.

'This month and next are the two months I dread most of all,' shuddered Mrs. Jackson.

New Year's day, with its grim reminder of the swift passage of time, aroused gloomy reflections during the morning.

The children were taken over to Paul's farm in the afternoon, as Fred, his wife, and myself, had been invited to supper at Martin Cranwick's shanty, three miles away, and deep in the pines.

Martin, over six feet in height and broad in proportion, met us on the trail, his rugged face wreathed in welcoming smiles. 'Happy New Year everybody,' he panted, as he trotted up. 'Glad to meet you, Jim,' he said, crushing my hand in his great paw.

Martin's wife was small and thin; her face had the waxy

paleness of one recovering from a serious illness. There was little room for movement in the Cranwick's kitchen. In the middle of the floor stood the flat-topped cooking stove, covered with pots and pans, simmering and filling the house with savoury odours. A baby slept peacefully in a cot beside the stove.

While the women prepared the table, Martin was only too willing to tell me about his early life in South Africa and his experiences in German East Africa during the War. Fred sat in silence; he had taken no part in the War and it was a tabooed topic with him.

'And what induced you to come out here and settle down in Canada?' I asked curiously.

'After the East African dust-up I went to France and saw some of the fighting there,' he replied. 'Then when it was all over, I thought of taking up farming, feeling like some peace and quietness for a change. Ex-service men were offered a grant of money and land in either Canada or South Africa. I'd always had a notion that Canada was a good country for a poor man who didn't mind roughing it, so I took a chance out here.'

The meal was a repetition of Christmas day: turkey, roast potatoes, plum-pudding, lemon, apple, and mince pie, and coffee. 'Come on, Jim, more pie,' my huge host kept singing out, ignoring my protestations and refilling my plate until I could hardly breathe. 'Oh, you're a poor trencherman,' he cried, when I acknowledged defeat.

'Now you've got to give us some music,' said Martin with grim eagerness. When I began playing I discovered that Martin was passionately fond of music. His face glowed with boyish enthusiasm, he talked with animation and played his one piece — one of Mendelssohn's 'Lieder ohne Worte'. Martin's hands were enormous, the backs covered with hair, the fingers coarsened by rough work; he struggled through the piece with the most elephantine touch I have ever heard.

The bundle of ballad songs on the top of the piano made me inquire who the singer was. For all his great size and rough exterior Martin was as shy as a boy. He was coaxed to his

feet, and after faltering through the first few bars of 'Absent', gained courage and then there was no stopping Martin. His great husky baritone must have sounded like the howling of a timber wolf to his nearest neighbour.

'You've got to come back again,' said Martin fiercely, as he shook hands with me at the door. 'You don't know what your music means to us.' A lump came to my throat as I looked up into his lean rugged face and saw that his blue-grey eyes were filmy with tears.

Terrible! I reflected as we drove homewards. Hidden away in the woods all one's life! Perhaps having a wife and children was a help. Maybe there were compensations I couldn't see! Chores, morning, noon, and night, for the rest of my life! God, no!

§ x i x

Fred handed me a tiny alarm clock before I went upstairs to bed, saying grimly, 'We're going to begin working in earnest now . . . I've set the alarm for you.'

I placed the clock under my pillow when I turned in, and, my mind occupied with the evening at Martin's, lay for a time watching the stars glitter icily in a steel blue void. The wind had dropped; the temperature was falling with a vengeance now; I heard the logs crack as they contracted with the intense cold.

An irritating vibration beneath my head startled me out of a sound sleep. Savagely I groped for the alarm and shut it off. The stars still glittered through the window. My teeth chattered violently when I tumbled out of bed half asleep. My fingers were too numb to tie my bootlaces. The stove downstairs had long since died out and the room was unbelievably cold. After a struggle with silly fingers I managed to strike a match and light my lamp. When I passed the grandfather clock I saw that it was five-thirty.

I groaned inwardly with the agonizing cold while lighting the kitchen stove; everything I touched numbed me and

rendered my fingers useless. My breath hung round me in a cloud of steam and the windows and doors inside the house were encrusted with flakes of frost an inch long.

With an effort I left the crackling logs in the stove, and lighting a lantern went out to the barn. Out of doors, the air hung dead, as if frozen into a solid block. When I drew in a breath it was as if two thin pencils of ice were being thrust up my nostrils. In the north, the Aurora Borealis danced weirdly. 'By jove, it's almost worth while getting up to see that sky,' I muttered, as I opened the barn door.

Forking hay in that searing cold was cruel work. Every other minute the pitchfork dropped from my numbed hands. I cursed aloud as I flapped my arms and stamped my numbed feet to restore the circulation. It was heavenly in the warmth of the narrow passage in the stable room when I fed the animals afterwards.

There was a clanking of milk pails, and flinging open the door of the byre, Fred hustled in. 'Get the horses groomed and harnessed while I get on with the milking,' he flung at me. 'I'm going off to the gravel pit immediately after breakfast.'

The intense cold sharpened my hunger so that by eight o'clock I was well-nigh fainting with hunger.

'The winter has started in earnest now,' shivered Mrs. Jackson, as she laid out the breakfast table. 'I got it over the 'phone that it was nearly forty below zero this morning in the village. Oh, I do dread this part of the year,' she repeated to me for the twentieth time.

When Fred had gone I made for the stable, and, as it was warm there, took my time in cleaning it out. In a leisurely way I went from one job to another. The way the breath of the animals had frozen on the walls made me marvel. 'If I was to go home and tell my friends in Scotland that the walls of this pig shed were covered with inches long flakes of frost sticking out at right angles, they would laugh at me,' I mused. The sun revealed, against the blackness of the buildings, minute particles of frost falling earthwards, like motes of dust in a room pierced by a shaft of sunlight.

Too tired and dispirited to think of music or study the atlas,

I dragged myself wearily to bed at eight o'clock that night. All I desired was to snuggle under my bearskin rug and get warm and comfortable. In sleep one could forget the bitterness of the world!

§ x x

Next day Mrs. Jackson and the children departed for Winnipeg. Fred drove them into the village and on his return handed me a letter from Mrs. Reimer, which I opened eagerly. Ralph had returned to Scotland, my grandfather aged eighty-two had died and my mother had sent me forty dollars. Did I want the money sent on to me?

I replied to Mrs. Reimer that night, asking her to bank the forty dollars as a reserve fund in case of emergencies. Things were better at home, Mrs. Reimer had said. My spirits went up. How long would the winter last? How long would forty dollars, plus what Fred owed me, keep me in the city? To blazes with the farm! I was independent of Fred's slave-driving now! I would carry on till he sacked me and then go back to Winnipeg!

The loneliness began to prey on my nerves. Now that his wife had gone, Fred was a poor companion, working silently at nights over his plans for the new barn. The atlas became my evening companion again. In imagination, I roamed from Alaska to Mexico.

'If I was a young man,' said Fred once, 'I would walk across the river out there and lose myself in the States. I wouldn't stay in Canada, it's too poor a country. But I'm tied down to this farm with a wife and children depending on me . . . I'm held here like a prisoner.'

'Do many people steal across the Border hereabouts?'

'Oh, there are people doing it all the time,' replied Fred. 'Sometimes they are caught of course and sent back to Canada.' Fred laughed, as he told me a tale about a man in the village who had hired himself out to a farmer on the American side. 'This Canadian had always prided himself on

being a pretty cute individual. The American promised him a bigger wage than he would get this side of Rainy River, but when it came to settling up, the American refused to pay the Canadian anything.'

'What happened then?' I asked.

'Nothing,' said Fred, with a grim smile. 'The Canadian couldn't take the American to court as he had no business to be working in U.S.A. . . . he just had to grin and bear it.'

§ x x i

One morning as I was leading a horse into the stable, Fred caught me by the arm and snapped, 'Say, you're far too slow in everything you do. Now put a hustle into it. What do you do with yourself all day anyway?' he demanded, glaring at me. 'I've got other things for you to do besides the chores. There's all that wood there to be chopped up before spring for instance,' he went on, pointing to the great pyramid of sawn logs.

'I wonder if you think I'm crazy,' I fumed inwardly, as I began removing the harness from the horse afterwards. 'Do you think I'm yours body and soul for ten dollars a month? A slave to be snarled at and made to work fifteen hours a day! By God! I'll be no man's slave!' I cried in fury, bashing the ugly snouts of the sows with an empty pail as they came grunting up to the trough I had just filled for them.

I harangued the inoffensive cows in the byre, when I went to feed them. This was the kind of thing that made Bolsheviks of men! The cold, the long hours, the companionship of animals, no one to talk to, no laughter or joy in life! God! Would the sun never grow warm again!

Fred prepared the meals and did the washing up, while I tended his horses.

When he went off to his gravel-pit that afternoon, I went back to the house and played Beethoven till I thought he would be on his way home with his load of gravel. When he drove across the river I was industriously chopping wood.

Now that I knew for certain that I would be discharged I sang as I went about the everlasting chores. Once while repairing the handle of a scoop I chanted what I could remember of 'Seigfried's Forging Song' and for an hour was the young Seigfried forging his sword. Often I sang Papagena's 'Maiden Fair and Tender', an aria which had a peculiar fascination for me. Was I destined to go though life mateless? I brooded on my loveless state in the manner of all healthy young men. What madness to waste time in this solitude! I recalled all the operas I had ever heard. Would I ever be thrilled again by a soprano soaring up to a top note at the climax of a scene? Would I ever be swept off my feet again by the surging might of a Symphony orchestra, and drowned in a sea of emotion? Would I ever have leisure to read all the books I had promised myself to read some day?

§ x x i i

I had been forking straw for bedding through a trapdoor above the byre. A greedy young steer had jammed itself in the narrow passageway between the back of the stalls and the log wall. In some miraculous way it had turned a right-angled corner, and there I found it gobbling the straw. 'Come on you greedy brute, get out,' I cried, trying to push it backward. It wouldn't budge. I shouted and jabbed the steer gently with a pitchfork, forcing it back to the corner where it remained, hopelessly stuck.

Wondering what to do I went outside. It was a grey day; a cruel wind was blowing. Along the road a team of horses was drawing a box-sleigh villagewards. In the tall figure striding beside the horses flapping his arms to keep himself warm, I recognized Martin.

I ran towards the road. The wind, when I left the shelter of the barn, cut through my warm clothing like a knife.

'Sure Jim, I'll have a look at it and see what I can do,' Martin said, when I asked him if he would help me free the steer. Martin's face had a blue pinched look. His clothes

seemed painfully thin and inadequate for the searing arctic wind. Entering the byre and looking at the steer, which with its mouth full of straw, eyed us mildly, he said grimly, 'I'll soon get him out of there'. Hunting round till he found a billet of wood, Martin gave the steer a crack over the nose that made me wince. 'Get back there,' he bellowed. Snorting with pain, the animal struggled back to the corner of the passageway. Martin was a giant of a fellow; he stood with his legs apart and belaboured the bony ridge between the animal's eyes and nostrils with such tremendous blows that I was sure he would crush the bone to pulp. There was a great heaving and snorting, a convulsive movement on the part of the steer and negotiating the corner it freed itself.

'There you are,' said Martin, tossing aside the billet of wood. 'You've got to show animals that you are master . . . It's no use being gentle with them. Come along to supper on Sunday,' he added. 'We would like to have a talk and hear you play again.'

'Would Fred let me off?' I asked doubtfully.

'Why, of course,' exclaimed Martin in surprise. 'He can't stop you if you want to come: the hired man on any farm is free to do what he likes after midday on Sundays.'

'Is that so?' I ejaculated.

'Of course, didn't you know that?'

'It's the first time I've heard anything about being free on Sunday afternoon and evening,' I said.

'Well, what about this Sunday?' queried Martin eagerly.

'I'll be delighted to come along,' I said.

'Good man,' cried Martin, giving me his hand. 'We'll have a dandy supper ready for you,' he called back, as he whipped up his horses and drove off into the grey bitter wind.

§ x x i i i

Fred's wife and children returned on the Saturday of that week. After one look round the kitchen, which had been hurriedly tidied before her arrival, Mrs. Jackson burst into

tears. 'Oh? I thought you were going to keep the place tidy while I was away,' she sobbed on her husband's shoulder.

'But so I did, dear,' he replied in perplexity. 'All the dishes are washed and dried; the floor's been swept up; we've done all we could to put the house in order . . . I can't see anything wrong with the place, can you, Jim?'

I shook my head. The kitchen looked all right to me.

'Oh look at the floor,' cried Mrs. Jackson. 'Look at all those milk-stains round the separator. It'll take weeks to get things right again.'

I made myself scarce.

By supper time Mrs. Jackson had recovered her spirits. By a remarkable coincidence she had been staying next door to the Reimers in Winnipeg. Mrs. Reimer had met Mrs. Jackson in a street car one day and talked a lot about me I was given to understand.

As she settled down to her household duties again, it became apparent that Mrs. Jackson's visit to Winnipeg had unsettled her. 'Oh, Fred?' she said at table once, 'You should have seen how bright and intelligent Vi's children were beside ours. It's the environment that counts so much with young children. Vi's children are so clever at school too. I wonder if we're not making a mistake living so far away from the centre of things. What chance have our children of getting on, against city children with all their opportunities and good schools and mixing with other children and getting rid of shyness and awkwardness in company? It hurt me to see how smart and bright Vi's boy was beside ours.'

Going about the chores afterwards, I thought over Mrs. Jackson's words. Civilization and culture were diseases; once the virus got into one's blood there was no hope. It was futile to try and run away from the life of the city; you carried the germs of discontent in your mind, and they flourished more vigorously in solitude than in crowded places!

Yet in spite of it all, there were times when I was really happy. The dawns, sunrises, and sunsets, and the weird dance of the Aurora Borealis, were a continual source of wonder and delight; the way the snow-bound land glittered when the

sun shone was enchanting; and, after all, it was a great adventure and I was seeing other aspects of life beside those presented by a little town in the Lowlands of Scotland!

§ x x i v

'Listen,' said Fred roughly, when we were in the stable together on the Monday morning after my visit to Martin's shack the day before. 'When you were away yesterday, the boy and I did the chores in half an hour. What do you do with yourself all day?'

'Spend half the day running up and down the floor of the barn trying to keep warm,' I replied testily; I had been up at five-thirty and it was almost eight o'clock, consequently I was hungry and bad tempered.

'I'll give you one more chance,' said Fred. 'If you don't get a hustle on inside the next fortnight you'll have to go.'

I began making plans as I cleaned out the byre after breakfast. Winnipeg was the nearest city! I would go back there and await the coming of spring, then wander on — do anything — just drift aimlessly? But every day I spent on the farm was a day nearer warm weather so I would hang on till I was chucked out!

Though there was a slight rise in the temperature at noon now, the mornings and evenings seemed to grow colder and colder, till one grey afternoon, a terrible wind sweeping down the river made me cry aloud with the misery and agony of it all.

'God! I can't stand it any longer, I'm going back to pack my things,' I groaned, throwing down the pitchfork in my hands and walking back to the kitchen.

Mrs. Jackson was baking. She looked up when I opened the door and stood with my back to it, feeling too miserable to speak.

'Oh, don't scowl, Jim,' she cried, after a short pause.

'I'm so cold,' I muttered.

'I'll make you a cup of tea,' she said kindly. 'You should

come inside and get heated up any time you get cold like that,' she scolded.

'I hate being a nuisance,' I replied. 'Only this time I felt I couldn't stand it any longer.'

'Cheer up, Jim,' smiled Mrs. Jackson. 'Wait till spring comes; you'll be coming in with a straw hat on the back of your head, singing like the birds on the trees. You've no idea how lovely it is here in springtime.'

Warmed by the tea and Mrs. Jackson's friendly words, I made up my mind to stick it out to the bitter end.

§ x x v

It was night, about a fortnight later. I stood at the ice-hole with the halter of the big black stallion held loosely in one hand; the animal's head was bent over the water which it nosed reluctantly.

I gazed up and down the frozen river. The light was fading from the sky and there was a desolate wintry beauty in the scene. Suddenly, as a distant sound broke the profound silence, my arm was jerked up. 'Whoa, steady up,' I cried, staring at the stallion, who stood quivering, its head held high. Its nostrils twitched; suddenly it whinnied in reply to a repetition of the first faint sound, dashed its forefeet impatiently on the ice, then, before I quite realized what had happened, the horse was galloping madly down the river. 'Whoa! whoa! Where the blazes do you think you're going?' I shouted, striving to hold the beast back. I hung on to the halter till I could run no faster, then was forced to let go.

'That's done it now,' I groaned, as the clattering hoofs faded out of hearing.

Fred was sitting over his plans, his wife darning at his side. His face darkened when he took in the news.

'You'll go out after it and bring it back,' he flung at me furiously. 'I need the horse. I was going to the village to-morrow.'

I stared at Fred in amazement. Go out and search for a

mad stallion in 'forty-below' weather, in strange country and at night! Why it was sending me to certain death!

There was a tensed silence during which we glared at one another. Muttering savagely to himself, Fred burst out with: 'What are you going to do about it if the horse doesn't come back?'

'What can I do about it?' I shrugged. 'I did my best to hold him back, but he'd heard something up the river and seemed to go off his head.'

'It was that band of horses that are roaming about wild that had called him,' said Fred when he had calmed down a little.

Two days later Fred brought the stallion back. A farmer miles away had 'phoned up and down the river to say that he had found a band of horses eating his hay and that if the owners 'didn't come along pretty quick he'd shoot the lot'.

§ x x v i

Telling me that he was afraid of the pump freezing and cutting off our water supply, Fred took me down to the river one afternoon. The handle was taken off one end of the cross-cut saw, a hole was chopped in the ice at a suitable spot, and then I was left to saw blocks of ice.

It was impossible to face the wind which blew down the river. My feet grew horribly numb as I sawed the ice into large cubes; my hands became paralysed with the cold and refused to move the saw up and down. I was forced to keep stopping to run up and down and swing my numbed arms. I was beside myself with the excruciating cold and was afraid of frostbite. Once, when I slipped in pulling a block of ice out with the iron pincers Fred had left for the purpose, I realized that there was a danger of falling into the growing square of open water.

An hour later I was chopping wood viciously. The exertion acted as a safety-valve. I had to hit something very hard to let off steam! This existence was enough to drive anyone off his head!

Lifting my head for an instant from my task, I descried a black speck making its way across the river from the farm opposite. With interest I watched the black dot grow and resolve itself into a young man about my own age; a little taller and broader, with a weather-beaten, healthy, open-air type of face.

'How are you?' began the stranger, extending his hand with a friendly grin.

'I'd be fine if it wasn't so dashed cold,' I smiled, delighted to meet someone my own age after weeks of loneliness. 'Did you come over to see Fred?'

'No, sir, I thought I would come over an' hev a talk with you,' replied the stranger, who wore a brightly hued Mackinaw. 'We all knew you were here an' thought you'd've been over to see us. My dad has that farm over there,' he explained, nodding across the river.

As we began talking in the egotistical manner of young men, he watched me swinging the axe with great energy and little skill. 'Say, you're using far too much strength,' he said, stopping me. 'Lemme see the axe an' I'll show you how to chop wood.'

I yielded up the axe. With light deft taps the American split the frozen pine-wood, making it appear as brittle as glass. 'You see,' he explained, 'all you gotta do, is give it a flick like that when the axe strikes the wood an' . . . Why, it's easy.'

I admired his dexterity, and, as we talked, the pile of chopped wood grew at an astonishing speed.

'How much do you get fer workin' here?' asked the American.

'Ten dollars a month.'

He dropped the axe in his amazement. 'Gee! Ten bucks a month!' he cried, his voice rising an incredulous octave. 'Mean to say that this guy here has the brass neck to ask a man to work fer ten bucks a month?'

'Of course, I get my keep as well,' I hastened to add.

'Gee, that beats all,' declared the American, addressing the grey sky. 'Why, boy, you could git two, three times that money for doin' the same work across the river. I guess the

woman in that farm down there would give you a job at thirty bucks a month,' he pointed heatedly to the farm further down the river. 'Gee! you want to come into my country, 'way from all these crazy Canadians.'

'I reckon it's time I left the old folks myself,' he said later, when he discovered that I came from Scotland. 'I'm nineteen years old now, an' a man doesn't want to spend all his days hangin' around the stackyard. I would like to git out an' see a bit of life . . . see some of the big cities . . . Duluth, an' Minneapolis, an' maybe Chicago.'

We began planning ways of escape from our present environment.

'I would like nothing better than to roam about U.S.A. for a year or two until I found a good job,' I enthused.

'But we would hev to work hard,' said the American seriously, 'an' not get like those bums that go beggin', "hand-outs", an' bein' jest a bunch of no-goods. A man's got to work fer his livin'. Canada's no good,' he went on, changing the subject. 'The Canadians are all crazy; they don't know anythin' but work; they hustle around all day like they were bughouse; they never hev any fun outta life. Say, how do you get on with this guy here?' he asked, nodding towards the farmhouse.

'Not too well,' I shrugged. 'He's always nagging at me to "make it snappy" and hop around all day.'

'I guessed it would be like that,' nodded the American. 'My brother an' I worked a coupla years ago fer him, hoein' turnips. Say, we worked till we were just about beat. When the sun got goin' down an' seven o'clock came we wondered when they had supper . . . There was no sign of anybody comin' to call us, so we broke the forks an' beat it home in the boat. You bet we didn't go back again. He came over to speak to my dad about it . . . Told him we weren't workin' hard enough.'

'Don't Americans work from morning till night without a break except for meals?' I asked.

'Gee, no! We ain't bughouse; we treat the hired-man like a human being, not like a darn horse. How long hev you been here?'

'Nearly six weeks.'

'Been to any parties or dances?'

'Dances!' I ejaculated. 'Do such things exist here?'

'Say, boy,' cried the young American in dismayed tones. 'What hev you been doin' with yourself since you came here? Don't you never have any fun at all?'

'Fun,' I echoed, thinking that a strange word to use in my present environment. 'Where do you have your parties?'

'Sometimes we go to the "Falls" in an auto; that's a swell town; lots of nice girls there; gee, a fellow can hev a swell time there, dancin' an' goin' to the movies, without slingin' a lotta booze an' gamblin'. Sometimes we hev parties among ourselves. Say, I'll take you to the next party that comes off. But what,' he demanded, 'do you do with yourself all the time?'

'Well, I get up at half-past five and work till eight at night and then I go to bed.'

'Gee!' said the American, shaking his head as he stared at me, 'that beats all. An' d'you mean to say that you like livin' like that . . . never havin' any fun at all?'

'Most certainly I do not,' I laughed. 'But there's nothing else to do but go to bed when I've finished work.'

'Well, I guess I gotta beat it now,' said my new acquaintance laying down the axe. 'You come across the river to-morrow an' hev a game of Five Hundred with us.'

'Sure, I'll be delighted,' I cried, greatly cheered by the prospect of new human contacts in a land where human beings were pitifully few and far between.

§ x x v i i

I groaned when the irritating buzz of the alarm clock wakened me on the morning after my evening at the farm across the river. My head felt too heavy to hold upright. Six hours' sleep was no earthly good to me! My nerves were jumpy and on edge, and the angry swelling on my left thumb where a small boil had appeared during the last day or two, pained me and added to my general misery.

The kitchen stove had been lit and the cattle and horses fed

ere Fred appeared in the stable to help me lead the horses down to the ice-hole to drink. In my dazed sleepy condition I forgot to bring the axe when we led the animals down the steep slope to the river. Fred's face darkened ominously when I told him. He had been monosyllabic about my going across the river the night before. 'Wake up!' he shouted angrily, 'do you think I pay you to sleep on your feet? Run for it,' he snapped, snatching the halter of my horse from my hand and jerking his head towards the farm buildings.

'Come on, run when I tell you,' bawled Fred from the ice-hole, as shaken into a towering passion, I walked slowly back for the axe. 'Go to hell,' I muttered, stirred into open rebellion. 'You can stand and freeze at your damned ice-hole and feel as I felt yesterday sawing your blasted ice. I'll bring the axe in my own time.'

Finding the axe, and feeling unutterably weary, I walked back with dragging feet.

'Come on; run, can't you,' shouted Fred at the top of his voice, when I appeared at the top of the steep slope above the ice-hole. 'Ah, you poor fool,' I muttered to myself. He looked mad enough to try and strike me! God, let him try . . .' All that was primitive in me surged up in a murderous flood.

'Why didn't you run when I told you,' snarled Fred, his face contorted with passion, when I walked up to him.

Feeling calmly murderous inside, I sneered at him and made no reply. Fred suddenly became silent. We stared at one another across the ice-hole. With the axe firmly grasped in my hand I felt master of the situation. When Fred's eyes wavered away from mine, I dropped the axe at his feet and walked away with a laugh.

I went back to the byre with a great load lifted from my mind. It was all over at last; I would get the sack and be free to wander on! But no more farms and loneliness! How much better it had been with the extra-gang at Mactavish, with all sorts of interesting types of men to study!

Fred passed me with the horses. Leaving them in the stable he made for the kitchen. While I was wheeling manure out of the byre he came up to me and said quietly: 'You'd

better pack up and go back to the city if that's what you want. There's no use hanging about here; you'd have to *work* if you went to a lumber-camp. Paul Van Hulst is going into the village this afternoon, he'll drive you to the depot; I'm too busy to take you myself.'

'That will suit me splendidly,' I smiled. My spirits soared.

'So you are going to leave us, Jim, and return to the big city.' Mrs. Jackson spoke and smiled so pleasantly when I went in for breakfast, that all the sting was taken out of the situation. Fred ate in a brooding silence.

'Here is your cheque,' he said, before going off to his gravel-pit. It was for twelve dollars I noted, as I stowed it carefully into my pocket-book and went upstairs to pack my music.

'I'll have to start doing the chores again,' said Mrs. Jackson as I awaited Paul's arrival. There's one thing we will miss, Jim,' she added. 'That is your music at nights. What will you do when you get to Winnipeg?'

'Try teaching music again, or . . . Oh, I don't know, I'll see when I get there.'

'If you would like to stay in the village and teach the piano I could introduce you to all the influential people and help you to get pupils. The music teacher there at present is leaving shortly to get married. Of course, if you wanted to do that you would have to give them a guarantee that you would stay in the village for at least two years. But do you think you know enough about music to teach it, Jim? . . . Another thing; I warn you that if you were to play the things to the villagers that you have been playing to us, they would only laugh at you. They would expect you to play the kind of cheap music they like, not Beethoven and those others.'

Bury myself in a village for at least two years! Be held up as an object of derision! Play rag-time and syrupy pieces from Globe Folios! No, no, I wanted to get as far from farms and quiet places as possible; I wanted to lose myself in dense crowds; to see long vistas of busy streets with tall buildings and streaming traffic; to feel that I was living in the twentieth century, not the tenth!

§ x x v i i i

'What was all the trouble about Jim?' asked Paul, as he flicked the reins and urged the team forward.

'Oh, I didn't hop around quick enough to please Fred,' I replied, taking a last look at the stretch of cleared land, the broad river, the surrounding pines, the white snow and the grey sky, which had been the stage setting for the past six weeks of my life.

'Yes,' nodded Paul reflectively, 'I guess Fred would be a pretty hard man to please where work was concerned.'

Paul sketched brief biographies of the inmates of each house we passed, telling me of the early struggles and success or failure of this and that Swede, Britisher, German, or Pole, and so beguiled the time until the village swung into view. As we turned a bend and I saw the line of houses straggling along the river bank, and noted how the country beyond rolled away in low rounded hills dotted with farms and clumps of pines, I was reminded of Ayrshire after a heavy fall of snow, and for a moment felt home-sick.

'Well, good-bye and good luck, Jim,' said Paul, after helping me to carry my cabin-trunk and suitcase into the railroad depot and repeating his offer of a home on the shores of Lake Erie.

§ x x i x

Though it was only about three o'clock in the afternoon, I discovered that my train for Winnipeg did not leave till long after midnight. I made for Main Street. It was great to be alive and have the whole world before one! I was going to be a rolling stone in future and not give a hang about anything! I sang inwardly. I walked on air in perfect physical condition save for the throbbing in my left thumb.

There had been a heavy fall of snow overnight and a wind had blown it into deep drifts at the roadside and against the bungalows. The bank where I cashed my cheque was a flat-

roofed brick building of two stories. Remembering the banks I had called at in my vain search for work in Winnipeg, I asked the young clerk how he liked the village life. 'I like it fine', he replied, in a friendly way. 'There are three of us and we "batch it" together in the flat above . . . A nice couple of fellows. We skate and ski and have a good time. The folks here are pretty good to us, asking us out to parties and that kind of thing.'

To my great joy, half a dozen letters awaited me at the post office. In my hurry to get back to the warm waiting-room at the depot, I recklessly left the board-walk and plunged up to my waist in a snowdrift, extricating myself with difficulty and profanity.

Seating myself before the glowing cannon-ball stove in the waiting-room, I eagerly opened my letters. They were from my mother; an old maiden aunt of a strict religious turn of mind, whose vitriolic letter, full of gloomy prophecies of the fate awaiting me if I didn't work like all earnest Scots, I promptly consigned to the stove, adding the writer in my thoughts; from a relation in Pittsburg and one in Detroit, and from a Glasgow cousin who had been an intimate companion for many years. After reading my mother's letter I chuckled over my cousin's. What fine times we had had together! Golf at Gailles, Prestwick, and Turnberry; holidays together up and down the West coast of Scotland! And to think that I should look back on those days sitting alone in a hut in Ontario in mid-winter, with twelve dollars in my pocket and no earthly idea what I was going to do next!

From the other letters I learned that there was a home awaiting me in Pittsburg, only the industrial situation was bad and work was hard to find. In Detroit, I read in the other letter, most of the motor factories were working half-time, and that America was a rotten country for a Britisher to live in — too much 'We won the War' spirit among the proletariat for the average Scot to stomach, said my relative — an ex-soldier who thought of crossing over to Canada to seek work under the Union Jack.

Reading between the lines of all the letters save my mother

and cousin's, only confirmed my new belief — that in adversity a man should avoid his friends like the plague. I didn't want their damned advice! None of them knew the first thing about conditions in Canada! All I wanted from them was a bright cheerful letter telling me about themselves and how things were faring with my friends at home! I was finished with my precious friends! I was going to discover what the world was really like without anybody's help!

Hunger put an end to the grandiose schemes I evolved for wandering round the globe and acquiring fame and fortune with which to return to Scotland and dazzle the stay-at-homes.

There was a cheap eating-house in Main Street; a bare cheerless place, with white oil-cloth on the tables, a strong smell of lamp-oil and a nostril stuffing heat from a coke-fed stove. I seated myself beside a solitary figure in a Mackinaw who ate noisily with his cap on. He had been sent in from an outlying lumber-camp for supplies. 'Sure, there's lots of work in the camps for a man that can use an axe,' he told me. His slow quiet solemn speech was that of a man who spends the greater part of his life in silence. When his eyes met mine I felt that he saw straight through me to some desolate stretch of country where there was nothing but pines and snow and the kind of silence that reigns over the greater part of Canada. I wondered if the same sort of look was creeping into my own eyes and prayed not.

The woman who served us did so in silence, pushing our bacon and eggs before us in a take-it-or-leave-it manner, but being accustomed to rudeness in public eating places by this time, I took no notice of her.

It was dark when I went back to the railroad depot; the sun had long set and the stars looked down on the silent village and the snow-bound land. With a queer aching inside me at the beauty of the world, I stopped in the middle of the roadway and looked up at the starry sky. The stars were so terribly remote; the Universe made one's brain reel at its colossal size; life was so complex, inexplicable, wonderful, beautiful in spite of all the physical and mental agony one had to endure in one's pilgrimage towards the darkness from which one sprang!

How terribly ignorant I was; how little had my teachers and the books I had read taught me how to grapple with the complexities of existence! What should I do with the rest of my life, now that I had freed myself from my past?

In the few seconds I stood there looking upwards into the night, I seemed to see further into myself and the fundamental loneliness underlying all that is superficial in Mankind, than at any time before.

CHAPTER IX

§ 1

HUNGRY, eyelids feeling weighted with lead, and, after a night in a superheated coach, my mouth feeling as if I had been chewing cinders, I saw again the office-blocks of Winnipeg aspire above the snow-covered prairie.

The Immigration Hall in Maple Street hummed like a hive when I marched boldly in, determined to be done with bourgeois respectability. From now on I was going to live on the terms Canada offered me!

'What are you doing here?' demanded Greysuit when I appeared before him once again.

'I am destitute; I want a bed,' I replied blandly. 'And I want to see a doctor about this thumb of mine which is hurting like the devil.'

'See here, Walker,' began Greysuit indignantly. 'Why did you leave the farm? After you'd gone I got a letter from Mr. Jackson thanking me for sending you to him . . . A fine letter it was. Then I got a letter a week ago in a mighty different tone. Why did you leave? What is all the trouble about anyway?'

'Oh, I was all right at first,' I replied, then drawled out a recital of the past six weeks.

'And what do you intend doing now?' demanded Grèysuit.

'Look for work in Winnipeg.'

'Huh, you haven't a chance. Canadians themselves are finding it impossible to get work just now. You should have stuck it out on the farm till spring.'

Grumblingly Greysuit handed me a chit. 'This entitles you to a bed and meals for a fortnight,' he said. 'Take it up to the Superintendent on the second floor and he'll give you a food-ticket. Report to me when it has expired.'

Exulting at the ease with which I had obtained two weeks'

free board and lodging, I walked up the stairs which wound round the elevator shaft. The stale steam-heated air smelled of unwashed humanity; the men who passed me on the stairs were a rough looking crew. It was going to be more exciting living here than on the farm by the look of things!

Seated at a flat-topped desk on the first landing was a burly man in uniform surrounded by a group of shabby Harvesters. 'Yeah,' he bawled, when I asked if he was the Superintendent. 'What d'ye want?'

'Where ye been . . . on the farm?' he cried in a parade-ground voice when I handed him the chit. 'Why did ye leave?'

'Because I was fired,' I snapped, taken in by his mock ferocity.

'Haw! haw!' he exploded. 'D'ye hear him, boys? . . . He says he left the farm because he was fired.'

Everybody laughed; and, though I saw no joke, I grinned.

When I looked at the food-card the Superintendent handed me and hesitated, one of the Harvesters stepped forward and said, 'Come on, son, an' I'll get ye a bunk in ma room.'

Slightly bewildered by my new surroundings, I thanked the small swarthy speaker and followed him to the floor above. 'I'm frae Kilmaurnock,' he said proudly, when I inquired which part of Scotland he hailed from.

'Kilmarnock,' I echoed. 'Why, I'm an Ayrshire man myself.'

'You're no' a Scotchman,' he exclaimed incredulously.

'Why not?' I laughed.

'Weel, I widnae hae believed it. Ye don't look like yin, an' ye don't speak like yin. I thocht by the look o' ye that ye were yin o' they Swiss or Frenchies. Ma name's Mat Howie . . . Whit dae they ca' you?'

Pushing open a door, Mat said: 'This is where I sleep; there's twa ither Scotchmen in here tae, but they're oot the noo . . . gettin' drunk I expect. Ye can hae that bottom bunk there . . . I'll go an' get ye a blanket.'

I stared at my new quarters — a narrow cell with four

bunks, a few pegs to hang clothes on, and lit, even in the morning, by a single bulb suspended from the middle of the ceiling.

'Here ye are, son,' said Mat, returning with a grey army blanket over one arm. I thanked him. We sat on our bunks and swopped experiences. An unemployed engineer in Scotland, Mat had found disillusionment, hard luck, hunger, and lice, in Canada. 'I don't ken whit tae dae next,' he sighed. 'Sometimes I think I'll let them deport me.'

'Deport you,' I exclaimed. 'What do you mean?'

'Whit! Dae ye no' ken?' cried Mat. 'The Canadian Government 'll deport ye if ye stey too long in this place. There was a crowd sent awa' back tae the Auld Country last week. Ach! It was a shame the way they were locked up in cells, then ta'en awa' by an armed escort, juist as if they had been a lot o' dangerous criminals.'

I was thankful that I had a few dollars in reserve.

'Ach! it's a hell of a life,' sighed Mat. 'But whit brocht a fellow like yersel' oot tae Canada? This is nae country for a boy like you . . . Ye've only got tae look at ye tae see that ye're no' used tae this kind o' thing.'

Now and then we were interrupted by Harvesters poking their heads in at the door to shout a greeting, a lewd phrase, or try and beg tobacco. The constant tramp of feet in the corridor, snatches of song, outbreaks of raucous laughter, cursing, and shouting, which came to my ears, made the place seem like Bedlam after the profound stillness of the woods.

There was a sudden scurrying of feet and slamming of doors as someone began ringing a handbell. 'Come on, that's the dinner bell,' cried Mat, making for the door.

We joined a noisy impatient queue. A fat vacant-faced Irish immigrant nicknamed Paddy, dressed in faded overalls, a tattered jacket and a cloth cap, had been appointed door-keeper with orders to refuse admittance to those who had no food-card or whose food-card had expired; he was subjected to a running fire of obscenity until he opened the door.

The dining-room, when I entered it, proved to be a large

room situated at a corner of the building with windows running along two sides, giving a fine view of the city; the furniture consisted of three long bare tables, wooden forms, and, in a corner, an American organ.

Following the example of the others I picked up a plate and knife and fork from the heap on the first of the three tables and lined up in front of the counter the food was being served over, receiving three anaemic looking sausages.

On the tables stood high-piled plates of buttered bread, jam in wooden pails, and tea in enamelled jugs. Being ravenously hungry it looked a pretty good meal to me, in spite of whining complaints that the 'sausages were fu' o' breid and the tea like poison'.

What a change from the farm to sit among fifty men of all sorts and conditions! Everyone talked loudly — a babble of Scots, Irish, and English accents — no one seemed to listen. There were many ex-soldiers and a few who looked as if they had come from good homes. 'Hm! I thought, summing up the inmates of the Immigration Hall, 'I'm going to keep my money well out of sight among this crew. Some of them are decent-looking fellows, but the rest . . .'

Early in the evening I undressed and crawled under my blanket to fall into a sound sleep.

§ 11

Loud voices reached down into the abyss of sleep and dragged me unwillingly back to consciousness. Opening my eyes I saw two aggressive drink-flushed faces staring down at me. 'Wha the hell's this?' one of them demanded of Mat, who said, 'Ach, he's a' richt; he's a young fellah that came in frae a farm in Ontario the day . . . A Scotchman tae.'

'How, do pard?' said the first speaker, swaying unsteadily as he gave a mock salaam. His companion, a thin undersized youth with a white foxy face and a whining tenor voice, seemed resentful at my intrusion.

Having satisfied themselves that I was a Scot and 'no' yin o'

thae bloody Bohunks', they began to sing with maudlin sentimentality 'Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon'. They proceeded from song to song. Others were attracted, and soon the narrow cell was full of Harvesters making the whole flat ring with their singing. In my wearied state, with raw nerves and throbbing thumb, it was like a mad dream. After the pure air of the woods, the steam-heated atmosphere fetid with drink-smelling breaths, sickened me.

'Well,' I philosophized, when at last the music gave place to drunken snores, 'I can't complain of the cold and loneliness here.'

§ 111

After breakfast next morning I had my thumb lanced by the doctor in attendance, then, in gay spirits, I made my way to Portage Avenue and the Reimers' office.

When Max saw me he looked blank, hesitated, then, obviously coming to a decision, smiled a welcome and extended his hand. Our voices brought Mr. Reimer out of his private room. When he saw who was with Max, Mr. Reimer started visibly. 'Well, so you've got back to Winnipeg,' he said in a constrained way, without offering to shake hands.

Bewildered, I wondered what lay behind this reception.

'I called to ask if I might store my trunk in your basement,' I said hastily, adding that I had a room in the Immigration Hall.

'What! exclaimed Mr. Reimer, aghast. 'Among all those Old Country bums and Socialists that are plaguing the city?'

'Yes, among all those bums and Socialists,' I replied bitterly, fully conscious of the contempt with which a man without money and social position is looked on in the so-called democratic West.

'Why did you leave the farm?'

'Because we no longer live in the age of slavery,' I answered, realizing the futility of trying to explain. People preferred to

misunderstand one because understanding meant readjusting their views!

'You had better go out and see Mrs. Reimer,' said Max's father, 'she's got some money for you.'

Mrs. Reimer gave me a frigid reception. 'You shouldn't have left the farm,' she said acidly, as she handed me my forty dollars. 'There's nothing to be got here; Winnipeg's full of bums. You young men are all the same,' she added cryptically. I learned that Ralph had got a temporary job in a department store at Christmas, then, after what Mrs. Reimer called 'an exhibition of drunkenness which had disgusted their aunt', he and his cousin had departed for Scotland. A long diatribe followed on the degeneration of the youth of Britain in general and Scotland in particular after which I gathered that Ralph had repeated to the Reimers all I had said about them in the long unguarded confidential talks we had had in his little room before I went to the farm.

Enraged and disgusted at Ralph's treachery, and ignorant of what he had actually said to cause such a change in the Reimers, I went back to the Immigration Hall. Max was the only friend I had left in the world! Dear old Max! 'Don't you worry about anythin', Jim,' he had said before I left the office. 'I never did care for that guy Roscoe . . . too sly an' crooked for me.'

I sought refuge from the narrow self-righteous bourgeois atmosphere of the Reimers' living-room in the din, ribaldry, and hale-fellow-well-met atmosphere of the Immigration Hall.

'I'm going to be low and wallow in the mud for a change,' I told myself, as I moved my belongings from the third to the livelier second floor. Finding a vacant bunk in a room which had seven or eight occupants I made myself at home. My companions in distress were a mixed lot of Scots, English, and Irish.

A six-foot Englishman kept rebuking a Lancashire youth called Harry for his filthy speech.

A little shrivelled-up Scot — shabby of clothes, bitter of face — was silent for long intervals; when he opened his mouth it was to utter vitriolic denunciations of the Canadian Govern-

ment in particular and all Capitalistic governments in general.

'He was an architect,' whispered a dark handsome Scot in my ear during one of those outbursts.

The most amusing character in the room was a slim horse-faced English youth who swaggered about, hinting darkly, in a hundred-per-cent American accent, that he was 'goin' to git the gol-darned sons-of-bitches with a gun'.

'That's Larry, our dangerous gunman,' laughed that black-haired Scot, tapping his forehead significantly.

The swift transition from the dull routine of the farm to this Hobohemian circle with its odd characters and Rabelaisian talk fascinated me and kept me within doors all day. To sit among so many men and listen to their talk was a holiday in itself!

The ex-soldiers talked chiefly of battles in France and exploits in billets, estaminets, and brothels, and of more recent adventures on Western farms and in prairie towns. They all were intimately acquainted with a Winnipeg I had never heard of — a Winnipeg of all-night cafés, speakeasies and 'Red Lamps'.

'Do you fellows dance?' I asked in surprise, when I heard the slim black-haired Scot and two others talk about dancing, girls, and dance-tunes, while titivating themselves before going out that evening.

'Of coorse,' replied the dark-haired Don Juan. 'Sure thing. 'Whit did ye think we did wi' oorsel's at nichts? Sit an' sing bloody hymns? Nae damn fear: we're the wee boys that ken hoo tae enjoy oorsel's . . . An' there's a hell of a lot o' fun tae be got in Winnipeg if ye ken the ropes as we dae; whit dae you say, boys?

'We'll tell the world,' they chorused.

Don Juan described for my benefit a night spent at the Holy Rollers, one of the many strange religious sects in the city. 'Yons the place for a guid laugh,' he began. 'They pray an' sing hymns, then turn oot the licht. Ye never saw onythin' like it. They start prayin', laughin' an' greetin'; some of them yell oot an' try tae climb up the walls, or roll on the

flair shoutin' that the spirit's got them. The great game wi' us is tae get beside a young lassie before the lights go oot, then . . . Oh! boy! Christ! I thocht I was gaun tae die laughin' the nicht yin o' the boys felt an auld woman's leg in the daurk, thinkin' she was a lassie. "Oh! oh! the spirit's got me," she yells . . . We were flung oot that nicht.'

'Aye,' a Glasgow voice said, as I drowsed off to sleep, 'I mind the last time I went doon Rachel Street. It was just afore Geordie was deported . . . An awfu' man for the women was Geordie . . . He was doon tae his last three dollars. Weel, ye ken the wey the lassies go on in Rachel Street, shoutin' an' wavin' at ye tae go in. "Goad," says Geordie when we were hauf wey doon the street, "look at that peachy bit wi' the fair hair. Christ, I cannae staun this ony longer. I'm aifter that yin if I've got tae pawn me breeks tae get her." Aye, an' awa' he went . . . that was how he spent his last three dollars.'

I felt like howling with laughter; life suddenly struck me as being absurdly comic.

§ I V

Larry, the 'gunman', was in great form next morning. Egged on by the others, he told me about punching cattle in Wyoming, Texas, and Montana; of gambling hells where he hinted he had 'shot his man', and to prove his words he opened an old Gladstone bag, disclosing spurs, leather chaps, lasso, horsewhip, and a pair of ancient '45 revolvers. Larry had been all over the world. From the years he had spent in U.S.A., Alaska, Australia, Mexico, South Africa, and New Zealand I estimated his age to be about a hundred years.

When the others told me Larry had been less than six months in Canada I felt he was to be pitied rather than baited.

I wandered up and down Main Street most of the day, drinking in the scene — the swaggering fur-coated Bohunks, the shivering down-and-outs, the rickety old shanties, gun-shops, Jewish junk and second-hand clothes shops, where,

I had been told, the Harvesters sold the articles of clothing they stole from their comrades in the Immigration Hall. Now that I knew something of the surrounding wilderness Winnipeg assumed a different aspect. There was something romantic about the place after all! Anything might happen to a chap in such a raw youthful city!

A red-haired man in the Immigration Hall had puzzled me all day; I was sure I had met him somewhere before. When I inquired who he was my informant said, 'That's Red Gregory . . . Captain Gregory, a richt mad yin.'

After supper that night I stopped Red Gregory and asked him if he came from Glasgow.

'Do you come from Scotland?' he frowned down at me.

'What are you doing in this place?' he demanded fiercely, when he discovered that we were both old Glasgow High School boys.

'Good God,' he muttered in an aside when I told him my story. 'You want to write home to your people and get out of this damned country as quick as you can,' he cried. 'This is no country for a kid like you . . . they're all a set of bloody rogues and rotters out here, and they'll make you the same as themselves if you stay long enough in their bastardly country. Christ! it's bad enough for a man like myself.'

There was something mad and Byronic about Red Gregory. He was of medium height and powerfully built with mad blue eyes. His short laugh was mirthless; the Celtic savage in Red had been brought to the surface by the War and its aftermath.

'Where are you sleeping?' demanded Red finally. 'You'd better move your things into my room . . . there's only two of us and there's a spare bed . . . A kid like you wants to be careful among all the bloody homosexualists going about this place.'

Though it was impossible to take Red's last words seriously, I moved into the big airy room at the top of the building. A day or two later I struck a slimy fellow from Lancashire in the mouth. He sidled up to me and said 'Gee, you are a pretty kid . . . Come on, give us a kiss.' I was filled with rage, disgust, and fear. What a loathsome animal man could be!

The days glided one into another. Save at meal times the Harvesters wandered about the frozen streets, searching for work as the authorities imagined. I soon discovered that only in the streets could I get peace to think — the Hall being in an uproar from morning till night.

I was stopped dead by the sound of a piano when passing the door of the Superintendent's flat one morning. I recognized the staccato double-octaves of the Allegro of Liszt's Sixth Hungarian Rhapsody, and, as I listened, all my love for music which I had foolishly assured myself was dead and buried, swept back again. What weeks of precious practice I had lost! My life was slipping past and soon it would be too late for me to become a concert-pianist! I could have cried aloud at the bitterness of my fate.

Sensing another presence I glanced round to meet the eyes of a tall fair-haired fellow several years older than myself. 'By jove, that's fine,' he sighed, a wrapt expression on his face. A group of Harvesters seeing us standing outside the door paused, then, before passing on in a burst of raucous laughter, jeered, 'Christ! d'ye ca' that music?'

'Swine,' muttered the gentlemanly looking fellow beside me. The music stopped, the door opened, and one of the typists from downstairs came out with a sheaf of music in her hand.

Feeling much the same lust as I suppose a drunkard has for his drink, or a drug-fiend for his drugs, a craving to play the piano took possession of me. I went over to the American organ when the dining-room began to empty after the mid-day meal and began to play 'Morning' from Greig's 'Peer Gynt Suite'. To my surprise, instead of the howl of protest I had feared, the voices of the Harvesters still seated at the tables became hushed. I grew bolder and lost myself in an improvisation — a kind of fantasia with motives from Wagner's 'Ring' set among whirling arpeggios and rapid scale passages. I felt that I had to play something of the kind to rid myself of the emotions raging within me.

There was a murmur of applause when I finished. The Harvesters gathered round me and beseeched me to play 'some of their own kind of music, "It Aint Gonna Rain No Mo", or something like that'. When I got up saying I didn't play jazz, a Lancashire Jew took my place and set them singing lustily with his vamping.

§ v i

Next evening I glimpsed the tall fair-haired man sitting alone in a small room with two beds, which, being in the middle of the building, had to have the light burning all day like the others on that side of the corridor.

'May I come in?' I smiled.

'Please do,' the tall man said, 'I'm all alone here.'

Comparing notes we found many things in common — books, music, places we had visited in the Old Country. Lost in our conversation, a sudden scuffle and uproar of angry voices down the corridor brought us back to our present plight. 'Oh, never mind them,' sighed Sydney Woodford, the name the tall man had given me. 'Let them fly at one another's throats and tear each other to pieces. Those fellows are like wild beasts the way they carry on. God! but I never dreamed I would come down to living in a hell like this. There are some fine chaps in this place too . . . Men with talent who would rise high in the world if they were given a chance . . . The world is all wrong,' went on Sydney gloomily. 'The old men are hanging on to the jobs they collared while we were fighting in France; they've got no use for us now. God knows what's going to happen; I can see absolutely no hope for the future.'

§ v i i

Next afternoon I was urged to play on the little organ again.

'But I'm a pianist, not an organist,' I protested.

A thick-set Scot with a battered face plucked my sleeve.

'If it's a pianna ye're lookin' for, Professor,' he said, 'there's a fine big yin in the Y.M.C.A.'

'The very place, let's a' go tae the Y.M.,' the others chorused delightedly. They led me off by force; among them I recognized Macneish and Knox, the two drunks who had awakened me that first night in the Hall, the foul-tongued Harry, the Lancashire Jew who had played the organ the day before, and a young Englishman in khaki breeches, who had a little sandy moustache and talked in a cultured voice.

The Y.M.C.A. proved to be a large building off Portage Avenue. In a far corner of the large entrance hall, I saw as I entered, a grand piano situated between two pillars. Clerks were seated at desks behind a long counter on the other side; men crowded into an elevator; a door opened and the sound of voices and clack of falling pins came through from a skittle alley.

The piano was a Steinway. I ran my fingers over the keys in an impromptu prelude. What responsiveness! What rich mellow tone! In an ecstasy I began playing Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata'. Only once before had I played on a Steinway grand; it had belonged to a wealthy Glasgow merchant whose two daughters had found me a stupid fellow who preferred playing their piano to gazing into their pretty faces.

Remembering that my cabin-trunk with my music in it lay in the Reimers' basement, I set out, accompanied by the sandy-moustached Englishman, telling the others I would be back shortly.

On the way, my companion related his experiences. He had sailed with the Harvesters, followed the harvest to the foothills of the Rockies, 'half his wages going on train fares and feeding himself between jobs'. 'When the snow came,' he said, 'I began working eastwards. I got a job in Saskatoon, shovelling coal for the C.N.R. until Christmas. Backbreaking work,' he said, 'unloading trucks; choked with dust all the time; your skin became ingrained with the filthy stuff. We stuck the job out till we were paid off . . . And now, here I am, stranded in Winnipeg.'

We arrived at the Reimers' house.

'You young bums from the Old Country,' sneered Mrs. Reimer, when I introduced my companion, 'living on the city and having decent hard-working folks pay taxes to feed you on the fat of the land, while you bum around all day doing nothing.'

'Why don't you get your Government to tell the truth about Canada,' I retorted heatedly, 'instead of covering the hoardings of Britian with lying posters? 'Go West, Young Man,' I sneered. 'Oh, I know you Canadians would be happy to see us starve and freeze to death,' I spat out, as with a bundle of music under my arm I walked out of the house.

Returning to the Steinway grand, I played Beethoven's 'Sonate Pathetique', following it with Greig's 'Peer Gynt Suite'. While playing the 'Death of Ase', two stout prosperous business men came up behind me and listened, moving quietly away when the last pianissimo chord floated into silence.

'Gee, boy,' cried the Harvesters excitedly, 'we thoct ye had clicked for a good job by the wey they toffs were lookin' at ye.'

There was some whispering, then the Lancashire Jew told me that 'the boys appreciated my talent, and wanted to thank me, but they would like some of their own music for a change; did I mind?'

When I rose from the piano, the Jew sat down and rattled out a dance tune, while Macneish began a step-dance on the polished floor. Puggy, the battered Scot who had suggested coming to the Y.M.C.A., took off his cap and declared he was going to make a collection. 'We've no objection to your playing the piano,' said one of the clerks, hurrying over to stop the impromptu vaudeville act, 'but we draw the line at step-dancing.'

'Come on tae hell oot o' this,' spluttered Macneish. A chorus of muttered oaths arose and in great dudgeon they streamed out of the building, leaving the sandy moustached Englishman and myself discussing their 'Eat, drink, and don't-give-a-damn-for-anything' philosophy.

§ VIII

A dozen men, including the fellow who shared a room with Red and I, were deported, and, our room being wanted for a party of Central Europeans newly arrived, we had to seek new quarters. I joined Sydney Woodford in his tiny cell.

Every day brought me a new acquaintance. The vastness of Canada awed me when I listened to the experiences related in one of the big rooms far into each night. Some of the men had travelled thousands of miles since August. Don Juan had helped to haul a ship's boat from Lake Winnipeg to the Hudson Bay. Some had harvested in the Peace River Country; others had 'beat freights' through the Rockies to Vancouver and back again; they had tried every form of labour Canada had to offer, and there were as many reasons for our presence in the Immigration Hall as there were individuals among us.

Once, when discussing the type of farmer who offers big wages at harvest time, then pleads poverty when the work is finished, Red described an experience of his.

'There were three of us,' said one Harvester, 'and when the farmer said he had no money to pay us with we just jumped into his old Ford and beat it.'

'I sued one farmer for my wages,' said a quiet discouraged looking fellow, 'but it was no good. The judge and the jury were all farmers. I got no satisfaction, and had only the lawyer's fees to pay for my trouble. It would have been far cheaper to have shut my mouth.'

'Huh,' grunted Red, 'a guy tried that game on us . . . Christ! Red gave a savage little laugh. 'A man west of Moose-jaw told another fellow and I that he would pay us five dollars a day. We worked for six weeks. When we finished this guy offered us sixty dollars and said that was all he could afford to give us. God, they would promise you the Kingdom of Heaven to get their crops in. We began arguing and told him we would beat him up if he didn't square up with us. He ran into the house and came out with a gun and watched us till we were out of sight. But we paid the bastard out; we went

back that night and set his — stacks on fire, then beat it like hell for a freight-train.'

The reckless manner of Red's telling the tale raised a howl of delight. I looked round the circle of faces. These men were the raw material with which wars were fought and continents settled! No, Canada was no country for a weakling or one burdened with too tender a conscience! 'Survival of the fittest' — old Darwin was right so far as Canada was concerned!

Slim, the tall Englishman who was constantly reproving the foul-tongued Harry, began talking about a Harvester he had met in a Main street café during the day. 'This chap told me he had been trapping in the wilds, between Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Winnipeg,' began Slim. 'He's made a good thing out of it. He knew nothing about the life when he went up North . . . just one of ourselves; came out on the *Doric*. Like ourselves he made a few dollars harvesting, then came back to Winnipeg. One day, he said, he was looking at the traps in the window of one of those places in Main Street wondering what to do next. It suddenly struck him that it would be a good thing to try trapping. He went into the shop there and then, bought some traps and a small tent, then with a supply of grub, took the train to Swan Lake and struck out from there. He told me he had to learn to skin the animals by experience — spoiling the first lot he caught altogether. The loneliness was terrible, but he stuck it till one night he woke up and found that he was freezing. That put the wind up him, so he came back to Winnipeg. He's going back next winter to do the thing in proper style; building a log hut and all that.'

'But whit kind o' life is that for a man?' a voice protested. The howls of the others proclaimed the fact that they could not visualize a life without lighted pavements, pubs, picture-shows, dance halls and women. An argument arose between Slim and the others. I blinked sleepily through the blue fog of tobacco smoke at the circle of excited faces.

'Neil Hareshaw's leaving the Hall,' said Red abruptly, referring to a big blustering raw-boned Scot from Motherwell.

'Whit! are they gaun tae deport him?' cried Puggy.

'No, he's got a night job with the Street Railway people.'

'Lucky devil,' growled Slim. 'I wish I could get out of this blasted place . . . it's killing me . . . and I've got my wife and two kids at home to think of as well.'

The news that one of their number had secured a job seemed to depress the gathering; everybody grew curiously silent and the 'ceilidh' was broken up.

§ I X

The Army and Navy Club occupied the top flat of an old building at one corner of Market Square. A party of Harvesters took me there one afternoon. We ascended a steep narrow stair and entered a large common room. There was a bar and two billiard tables on my left, facing me was a raised platform containing a grand piano, on the wall above it hung a life size portrait in oils of King George V executed, I learned later, by a member of the club.

'Here's a pianna for ye, Professor . . . gie us a tune,' cried Puggy, leading me by the arm to the platform. I wondered at their eagerness to hear me play. Men were seated at little round tables scattered about the floor, talking over glasses of beer. There was silence when I began preluding in a minor key. The touch was heavy and the tone not too sympathetic. I created a miniature thunderstorm with the Chopin 'A major Polonaise'.

The men at the tables clapped, thumped, and shouted 'Atta-boy, hit her up, sonny', when I broke into one of my wild improvisations. They showed their appreciation by crowding up to the piano with glasses of beer and cigarettes for me. Not wishing to offend the open-handed Canadians I accepted their gifts, and then, when the men had returned to their seats looked from Puggy and his friends to the glasses of beer and winked. 'Thanks, Professor,' said Puggy. 'Here's tae ye; ye're daein' fine . . . You play the auld joanna an' we'll drink yer beer for ye.'

I was hailed as a gift from the gods. The club resounded with the bragging of the Harvesters about their professor who

could 'play the heid aff onybody, an' neither smoked nor drank'.

Ever afterwards, when Puggy and his friends pestered me with their 'comin' round tae the Army and Navy, Professor?' I invented excuses about having business appointments.

Finding that the Club was quiet in the morning, I acquired a habit of going there to practice the piano after breakfast. As I never tried to borrow money, cadge drinks or cigarettes, I made friends with many of the habitués, who told me they were looking out for a job for me as I 'was a good lad that they wanted to help'.

I was playing the Adagio of the 'Moonlight Sonata' one morning when the bandmaster, a spruce, grey-haired man, came in to conduct a band practice. 'You'll do well in this country, boy, if you forget that stuff,' he said in his curt way when I stopped.

Luke, a hard-swearing, hard-drinking, broken-nosed Canadian, took a great liking to me. 'Don't you worry, son,' he always said, when I looked down in the mouth. 'The boys here'll look after you if they try to deport you or anythin' like that.' Luke introduced me to an old organist who frequented the place, saying, 'This boy's a crackajack pianist who's goin' to make a noise in this city before he's done.'

Old Suffolk smiled at me through his glasses. He had a benevolent face, round and rosy; his longish white hair flowed from under his hat over the broad collar of his greatcoat. 'I'll see what I can do for you, my boy,' he said. 'You have a better chance of getting a job if you play the organ, though . . . the public are crying out for organs in cinemas now.' The old fellow told me about a little cinema he had a share in, and mourned over the super-organ lost in a fire which had razed to the ground a cinema he had lately been employed in.

§ x

The arrival of an important official from Ottawa to investigate every case of destitution in the Immigration Hall caused great consternation among the Harvesters.

Though in a position to leave the Hall whenever I liked, I was determined to hear what the official had to say.

We were called down to the General Office in alphabetical order. Each man was caught and eagerly questioned as he came upstairs again. 'Och, he offered me farm work,' was the invariable reply, 'but I tell him I was gaun on nae bloody farm.'

'Aye, that's the game, boys,' the crowd cried, 'a' stick thegither an' refuse tae go on the farm.'

'If he offered me a job at ma trade I'd jump at it,' declared Mat, the Kilmarnock engineer.

'Yes, and me too,' cried Slim and a dozen others.

The official proved to be a quiet sympathetic gentleman. Motioning me into a chair before him, he asked me to tell him what I had done since landing in Canada.

'How much money have you earned since you landed at Quebec?' he asked, when I had recapitulated my experience.

'Roughly seventy dollars.'

'Is that all?' He raised his eyebrows in surprise.

'What did you do in the Old Country?'

'Worked in my father's office.'

'Can't your people do anything for you?'

'I'm afraid not,' I replied ruefully, explaining the reason.

Nodding his head understandingly and sighing, the official said as a matter of form, 'Won't you take a farm job?'

'What would be the good?' I shrugged. 'I have been dismissed from three farms already.'

Having an idea that my name would go down for deportation among the others, I began for the first time to think seriously about getting away from the Immigration Hall. The novelty of living among so many psychologically interesting types was beginning to wear off; the future began to absorb my attention again.

§ x i

Days passed. Spending all his time in a vain search for work, Sydney related his experiences at interviews every night. George Broxford, a nineteen year old English boy from

two doors along the corridor, struck up an acquaintanceship, and together we roamed the streets, eating in Chinese cafés when we grew hungry. His parents had been vaudeville artistes and his previous life had been spent touring the English provinces. We both performed at a smoking concert at the Army and Navy Club one night. In a light tenor, George sang drawing-room ballads to his own accompaniments, while I improvised piano solos and made the instrument clang like an anvil.

When the news of the formation of the first Labour Ministry in the history of Parliament under Ramsay MacDonald reached the Immigration Hall on January 22nd, there was wild excitement; rumours of Communism and red revolution in Britain filled the air. There was a fanatical Leninite in the Hall; a thin ascetic unemployed clerk from Glasgow whose glittering eyes betrayed a restless embittered mind. He told me he knew Maxton, Kirkwood, and the other Clydeside Socialists personally, and that he corresponded with them and kept them informed of what was going on among the Harvesters in Winnipeg. 'All this trouble out here has been brought up in Parliament,' he told me. My mind being so constituted that I can never resist the temptation to argue with people dogmatic in their beliefs I had many mental duels with the Leninite on the new religion of Communism. They always ended in a torrent of abuse being hurled at my dull bourgeois intellect which was incapable of visualizing the coming earthly paradise of the true believer in Karl Marx.

§ x i i

A group of ragged Harvesters crawled into the Immigration Hall one day. Like wildfire their story ran round the corridors. As I looked on the lumber camps as a last resort I sought out one of the newcomers, anxious to learn his story.

'And they turned you out of camp with no food and seventy miles to walk to the railroad in forty-below weather!' I exclaimed incredulously.

'Aye, they flung us oot,' was the bitter reply.

'What was the reason?'

'Och, they said we couldnae dae the work.'

'But you might have died on the way to the railroad.'

'That would hae bothered them a hell of a lot,' said the emaciated Harvester with a bitter laugh. 'If we hadnae met in wi' some Indians that geid us shelter an' some biscuits we would hae starved an' froze tae death. I tell ye,' he blazed out, 'the Indians are a bloody sight better than oor ain white men. Goad! they tellt us we werenae daein' enough work tae pay for the grub we ate at the camp.'

There are two sides to every story, but in Canada I knew the truth could sound more improbable than the romancing of Larry, 'the gunman', so I abandoned the idea of seeking work in a lumber camp.

A fierce strike raged among the lumberjacks in British Columbia. Agents in Winnipeg offering train fares and high wages sought strike-breakers. To the indignation of trade-unionist Harvesters one of them appeared in Immigration Hall. 'There's nae bloody scabs here,' they stormed.

I overheard some wily Harvesters planning to take on the job, then 'jump' the train at Edmonton. As a free trip to the Rockies sounded attractive I went down to the general office and outlined my plan to Greysuit. 'You could easily drop off the train,' he whispered. 'I would try it out, especially if you have friends in Vancouver. That's the fellow along there talking to those two men.'

Going up to the tall lean agent I said, with a boldness I did not feel, 'Say, are you the guy that's lookin' for men for B.C.?''

'Sure,' drawled the well-dressed stranger, eyeing me up and down with cold grey eyes, a wide-brimmed hat pushed back on his head. 'I'm lookin' for some teamsters. D'ye know anythin' about handlin' a team?'

'Why sure,' I lied, 'I've worked in the Woods.'

'Where? . . . In the Old Country?'

'Both in the Old Country and around Rainy Lake,' I replied, stammering a little under the unwinking gaze fixed on me.

'I see,' drawled the lumberman. 'But you aint a crackajack teamster, that's it. Eh?'

'Oh, I've had plenty of experience,' I declared, my heart beating furiously and my mouth as dry as bone. Why the hell couldn't I lie in a straightforward way like the fellows upstairs?

'Waal, I guess you won't do for me,' said the tall lumberman turning his back on me.

'You didn't bluff hard enough,' said Greysuit.

'No, I don't make a convincing liar,' I sneered, walking away in a rage at my weakness. Everyone in Canada cultivated the art of lying; I would require to do the same if I wanted to do anything at all!

§ XIII

One evening I met an old bearded prospector in the Army and Navy Club. He was lonely and hungry for someone to talk to after months in the wilderness. His tale of wandering about the goldfields of Australia, California, South Africa, and Alaska held me fascinated for several hours. He had been prospecting north of The Pas and, taking a Gold Flake cigarette tin from his pocket, he showed me the specimens of quartz he had brought to Winnipeg to be assayed. The little yellow specks I saw in the fragments of rock I handled was gold, he said. All the loneliness of the Barren Lands in his eyes, the old fellow thanked me in his slow dignified speech for my company, when I shook hands and left him.

I ran into Macneish and Knox on the stairs. I stared at them in astonishment. When I saw them last they had been dressed in shabby old clothes; now they wore brand new blue suits, new greatcoats with broad belts and lapels, new shiny, sharp-pointed shoes, new socks, shirts, collars, ties and hats.

'Say,' I exclaimed, 'I hardly recognized you. Have you come into a fortune?'

Knox fidgeted uneasily. 'Aye,' laughed Macneish, 'an aunt o' mine died an' left me some money.'

'By jove, that's great luck,' I cried enviously. 'You look great nuts now.'

An excited buzz up and down the corridor spoke of unusual happenings next morning. 'Oh, blast them,' groaned Sydney, when I said I was going out to find out the cause of the excitement.

Puggy was the first man I met. 'Whit! hae ye no' heard?' he cried, when I questioned him.

'Heard what?'

'Aboot Macneish and Knox bein' nabbed by detectives at the Army and Navy last nicht.'

'Arrested! But what on earth have they been doing?'

'Bye, they're the boys,' began Puggy, licking his lips. 'They tellt us the ither day that they were gaun aboot wi' a fellah that had five hunner dollars he'd made in the Bush. So here, they goes an' gets this fellah deid drunk the nicht before last, an' then ripes his pooches o' every cent while he's sleepin'. When the fellah woke up he went straight tae the polis-office an' reportit it.'

'But Macneish told me his aunt had died and left him money,' I said, in such shocked tones that Puggy and his pals shouted, 'By Christ, that's a guid yin,' then roared with laughter.

The white-haired Colonel tapped me on the shoulder the next time I entered the Club. 'You are free to come and go as you please, my boy,' he said. 'But after that nasty business last night we've decided to close the Club to the rest of the men from the Immigration Hall.'

§ X I V

There was a different feel in the air now. There was still snow lying on the ground and ice still coated the streets, but the sun was gaining strength and at midday it was mild and spring-like. While touring the employment offices I told myself that there would soon be lots of work; farmers sowing grain, builders building houses, railroads needing extra-

gangs to raise the track after last year's wheat rush. Growing more restless every day I avoided the Immigration Hall as much as possible, ate in Chinese cafés in Main Street, and brooded on my fate and the drama of life being enacted around me.

Puggy and his bosom friend, Frank Niven, an ex-naval engineer, found me seated on a high stool at the long counter of my favourite café one day.

'Weel, if it's no' the Professor,' cried Puggy, breaking in on my reverie and seating himself beside me. 'An' how's things, Professor?'

'Not too bad,' I murmured, none too pleased at the intrusion.

When the Chinese boy brought the bill I thoughtlessly drew a wad of dollar bills from my pocket. Something made me look up as I stripped a note from the roll in my hand. Positively goggling with greed and amazement, Puggy's eyes were glued on the money. 'Christ! Have a dekkie at the Professor,' he said in awed tones to Niven. 'He's been robbin' a bloody bank.' Recovering himself, Puggy sidled up with a leering grin on his battered face. 'Len' us a coupla dollars, Professor,' he wheedled.

'Sorry, I can't wait . . . I'm in a hurry,' I replied, slipping off my stool and hurrying to the door.

'Come on, Professor, ye wouldnae see us stuck for a drink,' coaxed Puggy, following me out into Main Street, and leaving his friend to hurriedly settle his bill.

Exerting his persuasive powers to their utmost, Puggy poured his woes into my indifferent ear; he lauded me to the skies. When it dawned on him that I had no intention of giving him money he was highly indignant. 'Weel, if ye're no' gaun tae staun us a drink,' he declared, 'ye micht at least lend us a coupla dollars tae buy the medicine that the doctor's ordered for ma bad stomach.'

'You might as well save your breath,' I said shortly.

'Ye're no' gaun tae gie us a coupla dollars then?' cried Puggy in a sudden fury. Stopping at a corner, he unleashed a torrent of oaths that took my breath away. His description of my

ultimate fate had a Rabelaisian vigour which made me smile.

Afterwards I felt uneasy. I knew a man with money was marked down as legitimate prey in the Immigration Hall. Puggy and his pals would have no scruples in robbing me while I slept! I decided to clear out of Winnipeg. Lumber-camps being out of the question, I thought of a farm, the last refuge of the down-and-out in Canada.

Indirectly, Puggy was the cause of my reaching a decision. In the course of a drunken brawl in an ex-servicemen's club in Main Street, he knocked a lumberjack twice his size through a ground-floor window into the street, and as the police and lumberjacks were searching for him, had to go into hiding in the Salvation Army Hostel.

'My name's down for deportation on the next boat, so I've got to clear out quick,' said Niven, after describing Puggy's fight. 'I'm going away on a farm . . . out West.'

'I'll go with you if we can get a job on the same farm,' I said instantly. There and then we went downstairs.

'Well, what do you two fellows want?' snapped Greysuit.

'We're thinking of going back to the land,' I drawled. 'Can you fix us up with a farm together?'

Greysuit stuttered with rage. 'You've refused farm work for weeks now, and now you come and ask me for a job as cool as you please. What's the idea?'

'Oh, I've changed my mind,' I replied airily.

'Changed your mind?' snarled Greysuit. 'And here's another thing. How is it that you called yourself a clerk when you came in here and now sign yourself as a musician?'

'How does that come about?' I replied, raising my eyebrows. 'Surely I am at liberty to change my occupation without consulting the Dominion Government first?'

Greysuit finally fixed us up on a farm a hundred odd miles west, assuring us that we would be working together as that was the only condition I laid down. 'Here are your railroad tickets,' he said. 'You leave to-morrow morning . . . and remember, Walker, I never want to see your face in here again.'

Red took me to a party given by Neil Hareshaw's landlady. On the way there he lectured me. 'The farm's the best place for you,' he grunted. 'Winnipeg's no place for a decent kid who's up against it. Nobody could keep straight long in this place . . . Christ! I had only been a couple of days in the Immigration Hall when an ex-mounted policeman showed me a couple of revolvers and asked me help him rob a bank.'

I was incredulous.

'It's a fact,' said Red grimly. 'He had the whole thing planned out.' Red railed against the rottenness of society and the fate which had cast him into the War and its chaotic aftermath and stranded him in Winnipeg.

We turned into a dingy apartment block not far from the City Hall. Red knocked at one of the several doors on a bare landing. 'Gee, it's Red,' cried the small toothless woman who flung open the door. She had a clear high-pitched voice and wore an apron over her nondescript clothes. In his gruff off-hand way Red introduced me. 'Gee, kid, I'm sure glad t'meet yer,' cried Mrs. Black, shaking my hand vigorously and smiling up into my face. 'The boys've told me all about yer. I thought it would do yer good to come along and 'ave a bit o' fun before yer goes out West.' From the first glance I saw that Mrs. Black was a rare character. She had a loud cackling laugh and swore like a trooper. Her husband was caretaker of the block.

I was led into the parlour and introduced all round. The pink-cheeked sensual Harry was there with two other Harvesters. A peevish youth with a weak chin sat on the couch beside three girls. Tom Sinclair was his name and the dark-haired attractive girl on his right his sister Jessie. Billie was a small, quiet, mousey-haired girl with a pale face; the last of the three girls, who were all telephone operators, was small, plump, and pasty, and from her general manner, a nymphomaniac. The latter, when dancing began to the music of a gramophone, wriggled her backside so suggestively that Harry and the other two Harvesters tumbled over one another in their eagerness to dance with her.

I sat on the piano stool and looked on. The other two girls

eyed their colleague disgustedly. Red and Hareshaw were closeted in the latter's bedroom, while Mrs. Black prepared sandwiches in the kitchen. A whisper went round that drinks were going in Hareshaw's room and one by one the Harvesters and the pasty-faced Salome vanished.

I conversed with the two Sinclairs and Billie. The girls were anxious about their situations. The automatic telephone was displacing girls in exchanges — some of their friends had been forced to seek employment in the East where the automatic 'phone was not yet general.

Billie, who was about twenty-seven years old, had a small but sweet soprano voice which had been trained, was asked to sing, and I played her accompaniment. Mrs. Black, in spirit the youngest person in the flat, appeared in the doorway with shining eyes. 'Gee, but that's swell music,' she cried, when the song came to an end. 'Come on, Walker,' she added, 'I've heard the boys talk about yer playin' the pianner like a Pader-ooski . . . let's hear yer rattle it up on yer own.'

After the Chopin 'A major Polonaise' and an extemporization Mrs. Black threw up her hands. 'Christ!' she screeched. 'What do you want on a farm among bloody pigs an' Bohunks when yer can play the pianner like that? . . . Say, look here, I'll bloody well adopt yer myself . . . You stay right here an' we'll look after yer an' treat yer like a son. You don't want ter be livin' among all those rotten ——'s in the Immigration 'all.'

In my astonishment at the old woman's proposal I laughed outright. 'Thank you very much, Mrs. Black,' I said, 'but I think I'll go out to the farm just the same.'

'Gee kid, yer crazy,' she howled. 'What do yer want to spend the rest of yer life among bloody pigs for when yer can play like that? Say, I bet yer'd get a job in any movie in this town if the right people heard yer.'

'She's taken a fancy to you,' cried Red, coming into the room. 'You'd better watch yourself, Walker.'

The party grew hilarious. Hareshaw's bedroom door kept opening and shutting. There was more dancing; the pasty-faced Salome danced more and more suggestively and the

other two girls talked of going home. The party came to an abrupt end. From Hareshaw's room came a sudden roar and the sound of struggling. There was a general rush into the tiny hall. Hareshaw had been drinking wood-alcohol; pinned down on the bed by Red and Harry, he lay in a drunken frenzy roaring that he was going to rape all the women in the house. 'Shut up, you bloody fool,' snarled Red, stuffing a pillow over Hareshaw's convulsed face.

It took five of us to hold him down. Mrs. Black danced up and down tearing her hair distractedly and wailing 'Christ, the bloody fool'll get us thrown out on the street . . . damn drunken Scotch swine.'

With a convulsive effort Hareshaw threw us aside and bolted for the door, everybody shouting and running after him. Red grappled with him on the landing and a violent scuffle followed. Doors opened on all sides and heads popped out growling ominously. 'For Christ's sake get 'im out of this,' pleaded Mrs. Black, dancing round us as we hung on to the howling Hareshaw. Red pacified him at last with promises of drink at a speak-easy and got him safely away.

'So that was what is called a "good time";' I philosophized, when I lay in bed, after stealing into the Immigration Hall through a basement window. 'I must be a queer guy without a spark of humour, for I'm hanged if I can see where the fun comes in in getting drunk and behaving like a madman. No, I'd rather have a night in the Immigration Hall here, listening to the men yarning about where they've been and what they've seen!'

Happy in the knowledge that I would be travelling on the morrow to fresh scenes and faces, I dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER X

§ 1

AGAIN I sat in a train, staring at a flat expanse of snow. The sun was hidden by a leaden pall of cloud. Lonely farms encircled by naked willows slipped past; now and then we halted at a prairie town consisting of a grain elevator and a cluster of wooden buildings. Winding into a valley gouged out of the prairie by a stream we drew near our destination.

Two men, each with a team of horses hitched to a box-sleigh, awaited us in the roadway beside the grain elevator.

'Are you two guys from Winnipeg?' the younger of the two said.

'We understood that we were going to be employed on the same farm,' I said, when, after some misunderstanding, it was made clear that we had been sent to farms miles apart.

'I don't know anything about that,' said the younger man, a small friendly looking fellow about thirty years old. 'I only need one man. Nobody around here ever needs two men at this time of the year.'

Finally, I elected to work with the younger man, while Niven, in a vile temper, after borrowing a second dollar from me, having had one before leaving Winnipeg, threw his bag into the other man's sleigh and was driven off.

I assisted my employer to shovel a load of wheat down a chute in the grain elevator. Afterwards we drove down a gully into the mile-wide valley. The village was bigger than I expected and had even a cinema. The road went up a steep slope, and about a mile from the village we stopped at a well-built farmhouse with a windbreak of pines and a fine view of the valley with its winding burn and clumps of trees and scattered farms. A profound quiet hung over every-

thing; the peacefulness was strange after the noise and confusion in the Immigration Hall with its tainted atmosphere, where so many of the inmates believed that the sole aim in life should be drinking, gambling, and whoring.

'Barring chores, there's nothing much to do till the ground thaws,' said Jack, my new employer, as after being introduced to his wife and shown my room, we went out to the barn. He was pleasantly surprised when he discovered I understood the tending of horses and cattle. 'That's so much the better,' he cried. 'Why, I thought you were a greenhorn altogether, just fresh from the Old Country.'

'I'm not exactly a greenhorn,' I said a little grimly.

During supper Jack's little rosy-cheeked wife, a mere girl, was eager to hear of the places I had seen. Having been born and bred in the valley, Winnipeg was a vast metropolis — to be talked of with bated breath — while the world beyond was a mere traveller's tale.

With his farm and wife and two cherubic prattling bairns Jack seemed to me to have all a man could wish for in life.

§ 11

I was called next morning about seven-thirty. Out of a cloudless sky, the sun sparkled on the snow; the air was filled with peaceful farmyard sounds. When we went in to breakfast after chores I drew Jack out and he talked of his early life as a cowboy in Wyoming. His parents had been Northumbrian horse-breeders and he had emigrated when he was nineteen. 'It was a lonely life on the ranges,' he said. 'Out for weeks at a time, with only your horse for company; sleeping under the stars at nights . . . But it was a fine life; you were healthy and free; you saw nature in all its moods; you grew to love the mountains and the wonderful sunrises and sunsets . . . You saw life in a different way from city people with their offices and movies and all that. But then, I guess I was different from the other men on the ranch. When they went

into town to drink and gamble and ruin their health with the women they found there, I stayed at home, and then, when the War came and the farmer had his opportunity of making money, I bought this place with the wages I had saved.'

By the adoring way she gazed at him during this recital it was obvious that Jack's wife worshipped him.

I revolved the whole business in my mind as I cleaned out the byre and stables later on. Life might be pleasant enough on this farm! The village was barely a mile away; my employer seemed a fine fellow! But what about my music? Could I give that up for ever, as I would require to do if I became a farmer? Torn between my love of an outdoor existence and my love for music, I could see no possible solution to my problem.

Jack set me felling the rotten pines in the wind-break that afternoon. It was work I gloried in; the feel of an axe biting into a tree-trunk gave me a peculiar feeling of satisfaction. Despite twenty degrees of frost I had to fling off my leather jerkin and white woollen sweater.

I was amazed when I discovered at supper time that Jack was an out-and-out Socialist. He railed at the elevator companies for swindling the farmer right and left, the railroad companies for their freight charges, and was most bitter of all on the gamblers in the wheat-pits at Winnipeg and Chicago and the financiers in the East. He waxed eloquent on the subject of the uncompleted railroad to the Hudson Bay, and hinted darkly that the Western Provinces would fight for their rights in that matter with rifles if need be.

As the first active politician I had met in Canada — a prominent member of local Wheat Pools and Farmers' Co-operative Societies, and so on — Jack's views were of great interest. Canada in Jack's eyes was no Utopia, and when I visualized the hordes of Central Europeans pouring into the country, banding into self-contained colonies like the Doukhobors, I saw the beginnings of a new Europe in the West with all the racial, religious, social, and economic strife of that hoary old libertine of continents transferred bodily across the Atlantic.

Jack sent me down to the creek in the valley for water next morning. I galloped off with a pair of fresh young horses harnessed to the box-sleigh. Urging on the horses with loud cries I stood upright, feeling like a Roman charioteer. It was a glorious day; blue sky, sparkling snow, and air like champagne.

The burn was overhung with young birches and willows; only the thinnest film of ice covered the clear slow-moving water; the snow was melting in the sun; little birds hopped about; spring was written over the face of the land. I noted the swelling of buds on the trees when I filled the two tin water-drums I had brought with me.

When ascending the hill at walking pace, I looked back on the valley with its little village and wide scattered farms and was tempted to abandon my music and stay there.

There was a brand-new upright piano in the parlour. Jack and his wife came running in when I ran my fingers up and down the keyboard. When I played the Chopin 'A major Polonaise', my employer's wife 'phoned up her dearest friend in great excitement, and holding the mouthpiece towards me begged me to play again so that her friend could listen too.

'But you shouldn't be here,' cried Jack. 'I'm darned if I'd be a farmer if I could play the piano like that. You ought to be in some big city doing something with your talent. If you want to stay here, you might be able to make a deal with the guy that's got the movie show in the village,' he said later.

'But has he not got someone to play for him now?' I asked.

'Oh, there's a girl, but he'd soon get rid of her if he thought you were better.'

'But,' I objected, 'I would hate to think that I had been the means of someone losing a job.'

'Say, Jim,' said Jack in a quiet, serious tone. 'If you want to get on in Canada put all those fool notions out of your head. This is a tough country, and a man's got to look after himself first and never mind about the other guy.'

A day or two went past. I grew more and more unsettled in mind. I felt sick, perhaps because of the change of air and food, or the early spring moving in my blood.

'We'll have to come to some sort of understanding,' said Jack at last. 'If you want to stay and work for me, I'll pay you two hundred dollars a year . . . we'll draw up a contract. But I give you fair warning, the work is hell . . . Think it over.'

Taking the axe I went in among the pines to think.

'Bury myself alive in a prairie valley,' I cried at length. 'No, no, it would drive me mad to live here for even one year.'

Frank Niven 'phoned me. 'I'm chucking this job up,' he said. 'What are you goin' tae dae?'

'Throw up mine,' I replied.

'I'm bringin' ma bag in this afternoon. I'll see ye then,' said Niven, ringing off.

§ 1 v

'I'm fed up wi' the place I'm at,' growled Niven, when he arrived at Jack's place. 'They've had me up tae the knees in wet snow a' day, fellin' trees . . . An' three women in the hoose, gaun aboot frae mornin' till nicht girnin' aboot gettin' this an' that done in a hurry.'

'I'm leaving too,' I said, telling him about Jack's contract.

'Engineerin's ma trade,' declared Niven. 'Farmin's a' richt for them that can dae nothin' else.'

Packing my bag I bade Jack and his wife farewell.

'Naw, I don't want their bloody supper,' growled Niven, when I told him Jack had invited us back for supper.

At the railroad depot we found that there was no train anywhere for two hours, so we returned to the village. In a small, mean, and very dark Chinese café, we discussed our next move over a substantial meal. A gramophone in the kitchen, playing a weird wandering kind of music, set me dreaming about hills and ancient civilizations.

'Is that Chinese music?' I asked the Oriental waiter.

'Yeah, wha'you eat now?' was his terse reply.

'Lend us another dollar, my tobacco's finished,' said Niven.

'Sure,' I replied quietly, handing him a note and swearing to myself it was the last; Niven's eyes were too furtive for my peace of mind.

'Well, where are we goin'?' he asked, when we arrived at the depot again. A westbound freight rumbled in and stopped to switch a few boxcars. When it pulled out, two burly brakemen stood beside us and so prevented our jumping on board.

'I think the best thing to do is go back to the Immigration Hall,' I said wearily. 'It's no use going West while the snow's still on the ground.'

§ v

Sydney was lying on his bed sucking an empty pipe. 'God! Walker,' he cried, starting up in surprise. 'Why have you come back?'

'Oh, I couldn't stay out there all alone and work for two hundred dollars a year, and maybe not get the money when the year expired,' I replied, feeling ill and depressed. 'How are you getting on?' I asked, after relating the events of the last few days.

'Don't ask me,' groaned Sydney. 'I was never in such a state in all my life; my clothes are falling to pieces, and God knows where new ones are coming from. I'm ashamed to interview people about work . . . I feel horrible in this ragged state. Do you know, when I called the other day on some friends who live in a boarding-house on Notre Dame, I was forced to keep my overcoat on all the time to hide the holes in the seat of my trousers, and when they asked me to stay to supper, I had to fake up an excuse about having an interview. Look at this shirt . . . it's the only one I've got. God! If I found anything on it I'd die.'

'What do you mean by "anything"?' I asked.

'Lice, of course,' said Sydney. 'Some of those fellows along the corridor are filthy; I'm scared to death every time they come in and sit talking on my bed.'

I shuddered.

Next morning Niven appeared to say that he had been down to the general office and that Greysuit was in a tearing rage and wanted to see me. 'Tell him I'm sick and that he can go to hell,' I snapped. When the Superintendent found me in bed and roared at me to 'get up or he'd bring the doctor', rather than have further dealings with the man who had lanced my thumb, I rose and went for a walk.

Harry fell into step with me. Old Mrs. Black had moved into an apartment block nearer the City Hall, he told me. 'We'll go and see the old bitch now,' he said.

Mrs. Black's wrinkled face lit up when she saw me. 'Gee! So yer didn't stay among the bloody pigs after all,' she cackled. 'Come right in, boys, an' I'll make yer a cup o' tea.'

When I inquired after Hareshaw Mrs. Black snorted. 'Oh, that crazy Scotch —— . . . got my old man the sack with 'is drunken foolin' that night you were there . . . The neighbours complained to the landlord an' we were chucked out on the street next morning. 'E's still with us.' Mrs. Black grimaced at a closed door. 'E's in there now, sleepin' . . . workin' on the bloody night-shift just now.'

While drinking a dish of tea, she said, 'I've no pianner now . . . 'ad to sell up half the bloody furniture. That fool in there spoiled everythin'. The two German girls livin' in the flat at the end of the corridor 'ave a fine pianner. Gee, Walker!' she cried ecstatically, 'wait till yer see the young 'un, yer'll fall in love with 'er; she ain't arf a peach. But 'er old sister, she's a snorter, she looks after the young 'un all right.'

'We'll go and see Mrs. Berg now,' said Harry, when we found ourselves on the thronged sidewalks of Main Street again. He took me to the apartment block Mrs. Black had held the party in and tapped gently on a door. It was opened by a tall thin girl in the early twenties. She would have been beautiful had her lips and cheeks not been so bloodless. She was under-nourished and her grey eyes had a tragic look.

'Oh, it's you, Harry,' she cried, in a pleasant soprano. 'Come right in and bring your friend.'

'Where's Erik?' asked Harry, walking in and looking round.

'He's gone down to the cinema,' said Mrs. Berg.

The room contained a couch, a sewing-machine, a small table, three chairs, an electric cooker and a refrigerator; the window looked out on a dreary expanse of flat roofs festooned by overhead cables and wires. Everything was spotlessly clean, and, by her mien, it was evident that Mrs. Berg had known better times. A little girl of four or five years came into the room and ran for Harry's arms. There was talk of a party the next night to which I was invited.

Noting my interest in two large photographs of a large country house, Mrs. Berg told me they were of her husband's Norwegian home on the Hardanger Fjord. 'You must come back and meet Erik,' she said, when I spoke of Grieg and Ibsen. 'He would be able to talk to you about these things. Erik is a great reader; when he comes home after cooking for a winter in the Bush he goes to the library and lies in his bed for days, reading books by the dozen . . . deep novels and things that give me a headache to look at.'

When we left the flat I asked Harry what Mrs. Berg's husband was like. 'He's a bloody swine,' he replied. 'Spends all his money on drink and knocks her about when he's had too much.'

§ V I

I picked up the threads of my life in Winnipeg again, resuming my daily visitations to the Army and Navy Club. The ranks of the Harvesters were sadly thinned: deportation had accounted for many, some had secured jobs, while others like Puggy and Macneish, were in hiding or prison.

I lived in a mental daze, terrorized by the blackness of my future. With a new food card for a fortnight and twenty dollars remaining out of my forty, I was safe from actual starvation for a time; beyond the spending of my last dollar I dared not look. In company I was cheerful, full of high

spirits and eager for adventure and new experiences; but alone, I was the prey of all kinds of morbid fears. With Harry or George Broxford I wandered about the city, or sat in Chinese restaurants drinking coffee and chaffing the Chinese boys and pretty red-cheeked sparkling eyed Polish girls employed in these places.

§ V I I

The party Mrs. Berg had spoken of was held in the poorest house I had ever seen: a two-roomed shanty which had been rented by a young married unemployed Scot. The front room was bare of furniture; the kitchen held a table, a dresser, and two rickety chairs. The baby slept in its pram; the parents on a mattress on the floor.

Beside Mrs. Berg and Harry, Oswald Alving, Mrs. Berg's brother was there, a tall blond Norwegian whom I disliked at sight. Dressed in a grey suit, extremely sharp-pointed shoes and a flamboyant necktie, with a colourless face, cold grey eyes, sneering mouth, and sardonic laugh, he looked at twenty-one years of age embittered and soured with life. There were two others: a little shrill-voiced vixenish Scots-woman married to a Pole, and a thin, debilitated girl with peculiar eyes — she was going blind, Harry told me.

While the others danced to the music of a portable gramophone, I squatted on the floor and talked to the unemployed Scot. My knowledge of human nature was so scanty that the sight of people dancing, laughing and joking amid such extreme poverty appalled me. Our host was optimistic. He didn't worry; things were sure to come all right for him.

When the party broke up and we passed through the ill-lighted streets of shabby shacks to the blazing Main Street with its humming automobiles and belated pedestrians, I pondered over what I had seen that evening. It was a new aspect of life — happiness amid extreme poverty — and save for the oaths which were part of Harry's and Mrs. Black's everyday vocabulary, as respectable as any mid-Victorian could have wished for!

§ VIII

'God! Walker, if this goes on much longer I'll go mad too,' groaned Sydney one night, after discussing a youth in the next corridor who had gone off his head and had been removed during the day. Sydney sat in bed examining the seams of his one shirt with a tin of insect powder in his hand. 'If I had dreamed that I was going to come down to this level, I would have let myself be killed when I was in France.'

'But the world can't go on like this for ever,' I said. 'There will be a revolution or a bust up like the finish of the Roman Empire if unemployment keeps on getting worse and worse . . . something's bound to happen sooner or later.'

Until Red Gregory and the wizened ex-architect came in for a talk, we carried on in a gloomy strain. Puggy, who had reappeared, and Niven, dropped in later, and the talk swung from the doings of the day to Glasgow, London, the War, wine, women, and song — everything but our troubles.

§ IX

As my roll of dollar bills grew smaller I saw the enormous black cloud of a crisis sweeping up over my horizon. My musical ambitions belonged to the past. Nothing mattered now! Life had developed into a sorry farce and the sooner I was dead and over with it the better! Meanwhile to hell with everything! I was in this mood when Red swaggered in one evening with Hareshaw and the ex-architect. Red had received his army pension and was going out for a pub-crawl.

I went with them determined to get drunk and learn for myself what made commonplace men rhapsodize like poets in springtime. 'Mind, ye've got tae pey yer ain drinks if ye come wi' us,' snarled Hareshaw as we left the Immigration Hall.

Turning from the animated blaze of Main Street into a deserted side-street, Hareshaw led us into a building and up a

flight of unlighted stairs. I found myself in a pitch black room. When Hareshaw struck a match I saw that the windows were heavily curtained and that three men sat at a table drinking. Hareshaw disappeared into a passage full of whisperings and stealthy movements. It was too much like a scene from a screen melodrama to be real. Enjoining strict silence as the place had been raided the week before, Hareshaw brought us each a glass of beer and collected the money.

'Where to now, boys?' cried Red, when we regained the street; Red was in his element now.

A notorious all-night café was mentioned. It proved to be a garish place: bright lights, red plush, white enamel, red carpets, and gilt-framed mirrors.

'Beer for me,' said Hareshaw, when, after seating ourselves in a cubicle near the door, a waiter came up. 'Everybody peys their ain,' he cried, glaring round the table.

'I'm payin' this round,' bawled Red, banging a fist on the table and flourishing a wad of dollar bills.

'Ye're daein' naethin' o' the kind,' said Hareshaw savagely, seizing Red by the wrists. 'Put that money oot o' sight, ye damned fool,' he hissed, looking over his shoulder at a group of taxi-drivers loitering at the swing doors behind us.

Red quietened down when the waiter came with the beer. I watched with interest two prostitutes plying a couple of men with drink across the way. The men giggled sillily, related stories in whispers, then burst into drunken guffaws; the girls signalled each other from time to time when the men's heads were turned.

Beckoning a burly taxi-driver with evil eyes and a battered face over to our table, Red said, 'Hey you, do you know where there's any good women?'

'Sure,' said the man in a low eager voice. 'I can drive you to the nicest lil' girl in this city.'

'Where does this woman of yours hang out?' demanded Red, when the taxi-driver had finished describing the girl's charms in a manner which was like a page from Jonathan Wild.

'I'll take you to her for seven dollars,' leered the pimp.

'Seven dollars,' echoed Red indignantly. 'Hey, d'you hear him?' he chuckled derisively to Hareshaw. 'Ach, away to hell,' he roared suddenly, leaping to his feet and swinging back his hand to slap the taxi-driver's face.

'Sit doon, ye bloody fool, an' don't start a row in here or ye'll land us a' in the jail,' cried Hareshaw, jumping up and pinning Red's arms to his sides while the ex-architect plucked anxiously at his coat sleeves. Between them they got Red to sit down again.

Without moving a muscle, the pimp continued to pour out a stream of honeyed words in praise of 'The nicest lil' girl in Winnipeg.'

'And does the seven dollars include the woman?' asked Red.

'Oh no; you make your own terms with her. All I do is drive you to the door of her flat.'

'Listen to him, boys,' jeered Red. 'Tell me her address and I'll take a tramcar for seven cents.'

'Ah, but what use is a street car if you don't know where to go?' said the taxi driver. 'And I'll want seven dollars for the address.'

'Gawn, get to hell,' roared Red, making a violent swing with his fist at the taxi driver's head. In the course of the scuffle between Hareshaw, the ex-architect and Red, the pimp made his escape and peace was restored.

Red's eyes alighted on me as if he had become aware of my presence for the first time. 'Here, what the hell are you doing here?' he cried roughly. 'Come on, out of this; this is no place for a kid like you.'

As the café had suddenly lost its glamour and become nauseatingly cheap and sordid, I accompanied Red into the street where the night air was sweet and cold. It was long after midnight and the city was deserted save for stragglers like ourselves.

'What age are you?' demanded Red, after a long silence.

'Twenty.'

'Christ! Only a kid . . . it's a bloody shame,' he exploded. He began lecturing me on morals as we tramped aimlessly

from street to street, with the tall office blocks soaring above us, in darkness, save for isolated squares of light where some business man toiled into the early hours of the morning or held a poker party. 'I'm going to look after you after this,' said Red, gripping me tightly by the arm as he spoke. 'You're not to go near that place we were in to-night again . . . d'you hear? You saw what the people there were like for yourself. And you've not to listen to those bloody rascals in the Immigration Hall when they start talking about whores and that kind of thing . . . They're only scum . . . the sweepings of the slums. Keep away from the whole bloody lot of them, and for God's sake get back to Scotland before you start going to hell like me . . . let them deport you if you can't raise the passage-money . . . Who the hell's to know you've been deported when you get home again? God, just look at me!' Red's last words were wrung from him in a tone of utter hopelessness and despair.

All night we wandered the streets; mysterious, poignant, infinitely complex seemed human life as Red revealed a side of his nature which showed all his blustering and reckless disregard for any authority save his own caprice to be a result of the world madness of 1914-18.

Haggard and exhausted we crawled into the Immigration Hall at dawn.

§ x

Mrs. Slowacki was the name of the little vixenish Scots-woman I had met at the last party Harry had taken me to. The next social evening that group held was at the Slowacki's shanty just off Main Street and near the Bible Society's premises.

The house was practically unfurnished: two beds, a chest of drawers, a sewing machine, a kitchen table, a pram, and three shaky chairs, was all that the three apartments held.

Slowacki, a small, broad shouldered, thirty year old Pole, was ignored by the whole company — Mrs. Black, Mrs. Berg, Oswald Alving, and Harry. While the others danced to the

gramophone I sat on the floor and made the Pole talk. His sad face lit up with pleasure. He spoke of his home in Poland. He was a lumberjack in winter and a casual labourer in summer. 'Soon I go to Fort William where I get work in Bush,' he said. 'Winnipeg no good . . . no work . . . too many idle peoples.' He shrugged despondent shoulders.

I had visions of Mactavish and wondered what casual labourers did when their strength failed them and they grew old. The gramophone blared. The nerve-racking restlessness of the jazz which stimulated the rest of the company harmonized perfectly with their outlook in life. In my abhorrence of the strident cacophonic foxtrots and one-steps which express the musical soul of democratic America, I felt more akin to the sad-faced Pole than the others.

How long would it take America to produce a Bach, a Mozart and a Beethoven? Not till the North American continent had gone through all that Europe had suffered since the first wanderers from the steppes of Central Asia had entered the gloomy forests to the north-west of the Mediterranean! Great music and poetry were the outcome of great national sufferings, expressed in the passionate outbursts of a few super-sensitive men. America was too prosperous and arrogant to be anything but artistically barren, I told myself — ignorant of the fact that Sinclair Lewis was writing his *Babbitt* while I sat there, and that there was a Theodore Dreiser and a host of younger men slaving at their various arts while I lingered in Winnipeg looking at life with scared and wondering eyes.

On the way back to Main Street, Mrs. Black said, 'Slowacki's all right, pore little —— . . . 'E works hard when he can get it. But 'er! . . . Peugh!' Mrs. Black screwed up her face and broke off with an expressive shrug.

'What a life!' I breathed to myself, picturing the day to day existence of the little highly-strung Scot with her pale thin face, bright bird-like eyes, and shrewish nature, and the sad-faced silent Pole, against a background of poverty such as I had never seen in Scotland. No wonder they took what they could grab out of life before sickness and old age landed them in the workhouse or the gutter!

One evening I was playing the 'Moonlight Sonata' on the Steinway grand in the Y.M.C.A. when an immaculate young man came up. He and George Broxford leant on the long shiny lid of the piano with their eyes fixed on me.

'Interested in music?' I asked the stranger, who had a pale thin intellectual face.

'Very much,' he replied. 'Don't you know the companion sonata to that one? It's a much superior work. Beethoven himself put it far above the "Moonlight". Oh, but you must,' he cried, when I shook my head. 'It's the one in E^b major, Opus 27, No. 1.'

'Do play something,' I said, rising from the piano as the stranger bent over me to play a few bars of the work in question.

With astonishing agility and precision he played Mendelssohn's 'Rondo Capriccioso'.

We began discussing music with youthful enthusiasm.

'The difference between a pianist like Paderewski and ourselves,' he said, 'isn't so much in technique as in breadth of vision . . . we can play notes as fast as he can . . . Take the opening of the "Waldstein Sonata". We play the first two bars like this! . . .' Beginning softly and making a slight crescendo, he played the two bars. 'But when Paderewski plays that same phrase he does this.' He began again pianissimo and broadened out with a great crescendo. 'It's the same with everything he plays; he looks down at his art from a great height, while you and I can't see beyond our own noses.'

Our talk drifting into the realms of technique, he began extolling the system of one Tobias Matthay.

'Who is this Tobias Matthay?' I asked.

'You don't know who Tobias Matthay is!' he exclaimed in horrified tones.

'Never heard of the Johnnie,' I said, unabashed. 'The teacher I had was trained in Germany by the Leschetisky crowd.'

Quivering with proselytizing zeal, the stranger began talking and demonstrating 'weight-release', 'forearm rotation', 'hand and finger touches', and other things which were so much Greek to me.

'Play me a double-octave scale,' he said, when I argued.

I did so, using ample wrist movement and striking at the keys from a distance as I had been taught. Having strong flexible wrists, the tone I produced was clear and bell-like.

'But look at the waste of energy when you play like that,' began my critic. 'Look at the difference when you use "weight-release".' He played the same scale lightly, with almost imperceptible movements of the hand.

Feeling that the whole technical superstructure my playing was based on was tottering on its foundations I argued in a fierce panic-stricken way.

When the pale intellectual stranger ridiculed the old German method of striking the keys from a distance I was forced to admit the logic of his demonstrations of this new Matthey method.

On my return to the bedlamic Immigration Hall with George I mentally raged and dashed myself impotently against the invisible bars of circumstance which held me caged in Winnipeg while other men were acquiring knowledge and skill. What a fool I had been to leave Scotland! For the first time, I suffered from homesickness.

§ x i i

The weather grew milder. A constant stream of immigrants from Central Europe flowed through the Immigration Hall. Arriving mysteriously at all hours, they filled the general office for a day or two, then vanished to make way for others.

My nostalgia tormented me. Walking along Main Street or Portage Avenue I would suddenly have a vision of the swelling green hills of Ayrshire, white-topped waves rushing in towards sunlit sand-dunes, and the blue peaks of Arran across a summer

sea. I would suddenly hear the voices of those, who alone of all the teeming millions crawling about the earth's crust, meant anything to me.

Winnipeg became hateful and foreign; the cloudless skies, the constant sunshine and the still lingering snow, were loathsome to my eyes. I wanted soft rain in my face again; to see white mists trailing down familiar hillsides; to hear the rushing of a burn and the rugged speech of countryfolk.

My refuge during those sudden attacks of homesickness was the nearest cinema.

§ X I I I

Early one afternoon I met Red, Hareshaw, and the ex-architect in Main Street. Supported by his cronies, Red lurched along the crowded sidewalk. He had a wild look; a lock of red hair fell over one eye; his pyjamas showed under the clothes he had thrown over them; with the belt fastened tightly round his waist his unbuttoned Burberry flapped out on either side.

'Hullo, Walker!' he bawled, stopping when he saw me.

'What have you been doing with yourself?' I cried in dismay.

'See this?' said Red. Drawing a roll of dollar notes from his pocket he dashed it on the ground and stamped on it with a savage laugh.

'Here, whit are ye playin' at, ye bloody fool,' snarled Hareshaw, pouncing on the money after pushing Red aside. 'I'm gaun tae look after this for you,' he said, stuffing the money into a pocket. 'You're no' fit tae be trusted wi' money.' Hareshaw seized the swaying Red by one shoulder while the silent ex-architect took the other and the odd-looking trio continued on their way.

§ X I V

Red's flight from the Immigration Hall, after threatening to tear Paddy limb from limb for refusing to allow him into

the dining-room with an expired food ticket, was the principal topic that evening, when Puggy, Niven, two Sein Feiners from Dublin, and George dropped into our room.

'I mind o' Red in France,' said Puggy. 'Goad, he was a mad yin . . . There wis that mony yarns aboot the games he played on "Jerry" that a book wis wrote aboot him.'

'Ah, he is a bad one,' said one of the Irishmen. 'He was in the Black and Tans after the War, and had to fly from the country because so many people wanted to kill him for the evil things he did in Ireland.'

A blunt remark of Puggy's about the Irish set the place in an uproar. 'God, those Scotchmen,' breathed Sydney, when Puggy and the Dubliner had been dragged apart and we were finally left in peace. 'I've never been in the company of Scotchmen ten minutes but there's been an argument and a fight. It was the same out in France . . . They're like savage beasts, the way they carry on.'

'I'm getting a job,' crowed George, who had stayed behind. 'I had an interview with a guy in the C.P.R. offices to-day about getting a start as a waiter on a restaurant-car. "Had any experience of this kind of work before?" the guy asked. "Sure," I says. "I worked on Pullman cars on the Great Western in England for years." "You're the very man for us; come back and see me in two days' time," he said. Gee!' cried George gleefully, 'If he only knew! . . . I've never been in a Pullman car in my life . . . But you've got to lie like the devil out here or you'll never get a job.'

'Some of us aren't good liars,' said Sydney wearily. 'That's why we've got to stay on here. If a man asks me if I've had experience of a certain kind and I haven't, I tell the truth, but say that I'm willing to learn anything . . . The result is that I don't get a chance of showing what I'm capable of doing. It's dreadful to think that you are hammered into being truthful and honest when you are a child, only to find when you grow up that truthfulness and honesty are the biggest handicap a man can have in this world.'

§ x v

On the evening of George's departure, a murmur of voices along the corridor betokened some unusual happening. Looking out, I saw a group of men outside the room George had just quitted. 'What's wrong?' I asked Puggy. 'Whit's wrang? Juist you tak' a look at they blankets.'

Two men were bending over George's bed. Going into the room I peered over their shoulders.

'What are you looking at?' I asked, seeing nothing but a pair of grey army blankets.

'Ach, Goad! . . . Wid ye believe that onybody could've slept under they blankets,' cried one of the men disgustedly.

Bending closer I saw that the blankets were one mass of grey moving horror. I stood petrified, then rushed trembling to tell Sydney.

'Oh God! . . . And the filthy young devil has been sitting on my bed night after night,' wailed Sydney. 'The degradation of living in this place is killing me,' he cried, frenziedly stripping off his shirt to examine the seams. 'I don't mind being up against it, but when it comes to lice! . . . Ugh! I thought I was finished with that kind of thing when the War ended.'

Now I knew the cause of that peculiar habit George had of hitching up his trousers uneasily and rubbing himself round the middle, saying 'Gee, I guess I must have the itch.' Cold sweats broke out on me, and, even when I had ascertained that my own clothes were clean, I still shuddered.

§ x v i

We lay on our beds waiting for our mid-day meal. I was down to my last two dollars and my food-card had only a few days to run. Sydney talked of his girl and the glories of Devon in summer. 'Say, Sydney,' I interrupted, 'how would you like a good square feed?'

'For God's sake don't talk about it, Walker,' he moaned. 'I've forgotten what a decent meal tastes like.'

'But I'm serious,' I went on. 'I've got a two-dollar note in my pocket-book; when that's gone I'll be penniless. I may as well spend it now as keep wondering how long I can live on two dollars when my food-ticket expires. What do you say to a decent lunch to-day?'

In the biggest Chinese café in Main Street we were gay over a fifty-cent meal. I called for the bill as we finished our coffee. My heart missed a beat when I opened my pocket-book and saw that the two-dollar bill had vanished. Laying the pocket-book flat on the table I emptied it of old letters and snapshots with trembling hands, but no, the bill had disappeared.

'Can't you find it?' said Sydney anxiously.

'No, it was in that flap there when I went to bed last night,' I replied. As the predicament we were in began to dawn on me, I searched all my pockets, turning the contents out on the table and pulling the lining out of pocket after pocket, but all in vain.

'Oh, God, this is terrible,' groaned Sydney, burying his head in his hands. 'Are you sure you had the money yesterday?'

'Of course,' I said, staring at Sydney's haggard face.

Well, the meal had been eaten and now we hadn't a cent between us! My imagination carried me in one bound to police-courts and prisons. I beat my head with my fists in the effort to reach a speedy solution of the problem.

'How would it do if I left my overcoat as security and tried to raise the money later?' I said desperately.

'It's too cold yet to do without an overcoat,' protested Sydney. He looked down at a gold signet ring as I rose and began peeling off my heavy coat.

'I'll leave this ring,' he said, striding across to the fat dignified Chinaman seated in the cash-desk.

I felt utterly humiliated.

'I fixed it up all right,' said Sydney, coming back. 'The old Chinaman was very decent about it.'

When we returned to the Immigration Hall, I discovered that my leather jerkin had also vanished. Reporting the matter

was futile, so I shrugged my shoulders and thought of the grinning Puggy.

§ x v i i

Erik Berg's Viking ancestry was plainly evident. He was over six feet in height and broad in proportion. His hair was fair, his nose hooked like bird of prey, but he was growing flabby and there were pouches under his blue eyes.

Erik had travelled much in Europe and America and had acquired a cosmopolitan outlook. 'You must come down to the cinema and see me,' he said in his halting English, as, after an hour's talk during which we discovered many things in common, I rose to go that first time I met him.

'Erik likes you, Walker,' said Mrs. Berg, the next time Harry and I called. 'He says you are a gentleman and can't understand you associating with a clod like Harry . . . he hates Harry.' She spoke in an undertone, and, as I looked from her to Harry playing with the child at the window, I thought 'Perhaps with good reason.' I had growing doubts as to Harry's relations with Mrs. Berg.

Erik Berg came of a family of considerable standing. 'We have been invited over to Norway again and again,' said Mrs. Berg. 'Erik's father would like him to live at home. We had to make a trip after the baby was born; they were so keen to see the baby. Oh, they were so kind . . . his mother begged us to stay, or leave the baby, but Erik wanted to return. He drank all the time we were there. He used to go down to the wine cellar when everybody had gone to bed and come back with his arms full of bottles . . . champagne and all sorts of wines. Oh, it was a shame the way he robbed his father's cellar.'

Mrs. Berg painted a picture of her husband as a kind of Peer Gynt.

§ x v i i i

The cinema Erik worked in was a ramshackle wooden building plastered with flaring posters, situated between a pool-

room and a brick warehouse with blank walls. Street cars rattled past the shabby entrance, and slim Jewish adolescents of both sexes stared at me as they lounged against the walls.

At the swing doors leading into the darkened auditorium I found Erik collecting tickets. The hot stuffy atmosphere was impregnated with the sharp tang of orange peel; a boy passed me bearing a tray laden with pea-nuts, candy, and fresh fruit.

'Go in, Johnnie, and find a seat; I'll see you later,' said Erik. I groped my way to a seat near the front. When my eyes became accustomed to the dim light I saw that my neighbours were mostly fat Jewesses and wriggling talkative children. Everyone chewed vigorously and kept up a running commentary on the action flickering across the screen.

Endless fox-trots were strummed on a piano. While he played, the pianist had his head bent in conversation with a girl in a white dress seated beside him.

Erik introduced me to the pianist during his twenty-minute interval. Bromley was his name, a slim medium-sized Englishman of about thirty years of age. He was well dressed, and wore a pink shirt and collar, plastered his fair hair straight back, and talked volubly.

Erik and Bromley had a game of Boston pool in the frowsy place next door. They also had a few whispered words with the big shirt-sleeved proprietor which resulted in the contents of a flask being swallowed between them. Bromley in an expansive mood promised to turn over his piano pupils to me. 'You must come back often and play for me during the intervals,' he laughed, as we shook hands in parting.

'I will,' I declared, determined to secure the pupils he talked so disparagingly about.

§ x i x

The Superintendent rose to his feet and beckoned me aside when I passed his desk next morning. 'Say, Walker,' he began in a whisper. 'You clear out of here to-day . . . d'ye hear? . . . Your name's down on the next list for deportation. Those

other fellows are only a set of scallywags dragged up in slums . . . it doesn't matter to them whether they're deported or not; they'll never get anywhere, anyway. But a youngster like yourself, coming from decent folks, doesn't want the disgrace of being deported as an "undesirable" hanging over him for the rest of his life . . . Take my advice and get out at once.'

CHAPTER XI

§ 1

GREATLY agitated, I hurried out of the Immigration Hall. I walked blindly. Now that I hadn't a cent in the world, where could I go if I stayed in Winnipeg? A temptation to allow myself to be deported was put behind me by a vision of the little Lowland town with its narrow outlook, its whispering voices and long memory.

'Gee! it's you, Walker,' cried Mrs. Black, when she opened the door in answer to my knock. 'Come right in, son, I'm real glad to see yer . . . I'm just gettin' things tidied up!'

'Gee, Walker, we ain't goin' to let those ——s at the Immigration Hall deport yer,' she cried indignantly, when I gave her my news. 'You bring yer things up here an' yer can sleep with that big —— Hareshaw till ye get a job.'

When Hareshaw was told I was to share his bed he grumbled.

'Christ! Would yer have the kid sleep out in the street . . . An' one of yer own countrymen too,' began Mrs. Black, soon lashing Hareshaw into a surly acquiescence.

'You buck up, son,' cried Mrs. Black, when I returned to the flat with my belongings and a dejected air. 'We'll get yer a job, don't yer worry . . . yer'll laugh at all this yet.'

Luke asked if I had received bad news when he saw me at the Club. 'Hi! You guys come an' listen to this,' he bawled to the men around when I told him about my threatened deportation. A chorus of indignation arose around me.

'Have you anywhere to sleep to-night?' asked Luke, after bringing me a plate of sandwiches and a glass of beer. He drew a roll of greenbacks from his hip-pocket and demanded to know if I needed any money when I told him about Mrs. Black. I shook my head and thanked them all for their sympathy. Their words of encouragement and comradeship

brought the tears to my eyes. 'What a fine crowd they are,' I said to myself when I left.

§ 11

Next morning I made a tour of the employment offices. It was hopeless; the same groups of depressed Bohunks, the same slow shake of the head when I made my inquiries. I felt desperate. Once, as I turned into Portage Avenue, I laughed aloud. The words of the unemployed man on the road to Ayr came back: 'Naw, naw, there's nae fear o' a young gentleman like you ever comin' doon tae the like o' this.' God! It was funny! Was it really true that I was in Canada, penniless, jobless, and homeless? I touched the walls of the building I was passing to assure myself that it was not the creation of a dream.

My poor head was everlastingly spinning round with its futile attempts to unravel the tangled threads of my life. Dimly I began to perceive the vast part played by blind chance in the shaping of a man's destiny.

At supper-time Red called on Hareshaw. 'Huh, is this where you are now?' he sneered at me. 'What about my money?' he demanded of Hareshaw. 'Come on, give it up. You saw him take it that day in Main Street, didn't you, Walker?'

'Shut up,' snarled Hareshaw. 'Ye're no' gaun tae start a row in here.'

They went into Hareshaw's bedroom and bawled angrily at one another. Finally Red stormed out, crying, 'Christ! It's coming to it when a man can't get his own money to spend.'

'Ye're no' gaun tae get it,' cried Hareshaw. 'Ye'll only throw it away on drink.'

'What the hell has it got to do with you what I spend it on!' fumed Red. 'It's my money and I'll spend it as I bloody well like. I believe you've spent it yourself.'

'Ye're a bloody liar.'

'Well, let me see it then.'

'Ye're no' gaun tae see it till ye're sober,' said Hareshaw evasively.

'Ach Christ! Go and — yourself,' shouted Red, barging out and slamming the door behind him with tremendous force.

Mrs. Black sat panic-stricken.

§ III

The next night found me back at Erik Berg's cinema. I talked with Bromley, the pianist, while he 'made up his fox-trots as he went along'. He was a compositor by trade, but unemployed. He had studied music in England as a hobby and 'passed some exams'. Did I know Raff's 'Tarantelle'? . . . a fearfully difficult thing . . . at one time he had worked at that piece for another exam. Had I my diploma? No . . . a pity; a diploma was so useful in Canada . . . people were silly enough to believe that a man with letters after his name was a Paderewski!

'It's my interval now, would you like to play?' he asked.

'I'd be delighted to,' I replied eagerly.

While wrapped up in Greig's 'Morning' I heard a movement beside me. It was Erik, staring at me in great agitation.

'Go on, Johnnie, play on,' he whispered hoarsely. 'You don't know what this means to me.'

When I had played through all I could remember of the 'Peer Gynt Suite' Erik said haltingly, 'Thanks, Johnnie, you have brought back so many things to me. I never thought I would hear that music again. A great friend who was a wonderful pianist used to play those things to me, and Grieg was a great friend of my mother's too.'

'A great friend of Grieg's,' I ejaculated.

'I will see you later, Johnnie,' said Erik, moving away.

When the drama on the screen reached its climax I broke into one of my stormy improvisations. 'Splendid, Johnnie,' cried Bromley on his reappearance. 'You have a marvellous touch, and a great future before you.'

'I make hundreds of mistakes,' I laughed.

'But who's to know whether you are making mistakes or not?' cried Bromley, as he began playing his fox-trots again.

'I feel ashamed to play now,' he said, making a wry face at the keyboard. 'But I've got to play this kind of thing to keep my job.' Again he talked of handing his pupils over to me. They would make more progress with me. In any case he was thinking of moving on to Vancouver where there was more hope of getting a situation as a compositor!

When the building had emptied Erik made me play to him. 'We'll have a drink now, Johnnie,' he said at length, leading me down a rickety ladder into the basement. 'It isn't very comfortable down here,' he apologized, noting my eyes roving from the workbench littered with tools and empty beer-bottles, to the heating furnace, heaps of coal and ashes, and grimy joists festooned with cobwebs. Saying that he was going for a 'bottle of hootch', Erik lumbered up the ladder again. On his return he offered me some ham sandwiches which I accepted gratefully as I was ravenously hungry.

Erik explained the presence of the many beer cases lying under the workbench by telling me he had a friend who was manager of a brewery. After drinking a bottle of beer each, Erik produced a flat bottle from his hip-pocket and holding it up to the electric bulb suspended from the ceiling, said, 'This is wood alcohol . . . this stuff has a kick, Johnnie. I always take it with Orangeade to give it a taste.' Pouring a little of the colourless fluid into a glass and filling it up with Orangeade, Erik offered the concoction to me. After a slight hesitation, I accepted the glass. I coughed and spluttered and managed to get the vile stuff down.

Filling himself a glass, Erik began talking about the difficulty of getting a good drink in Winnipeg, and then about himself. Feeling a bit queer, I grinned and nodded sympathetically. 'I must be getting drunk,' I told myself, resting my back against the wall as the world seemed to be losing its stability.

'Do you play the piano yourself?' I asked.

'No, Johnnie, but I love listening to good music. My mother is a fine pianiste . . . she loves all things that are beautiful — flowers, pictures, music, books. When my music-master called I always jumped out of the window and ran down to the sea.

I loved to be out in the open-air — sailing, fishing, and hunting . . . My brothers and I spent all our summers sailing a yacht on the fjords . . . Have you ever been to Norway, Johnnie? You must go there and visit my people when you go back to Europe; they would welcome you.'

'When did you come to Canada?' I asked.

'My father sent me on a visit to an uncle in Ontario when I was seventeen years old,' began Erik. 'When I got to Montreal I fell in with a crowd of wild young fellows. We drank and gambled, and I spent all of the five hundred dollars I had landed with. They were building the Grand Trunk Pacific railroad out in Saskatchewan at that time, so I went out there. I didn't care for the work and went off with an old hunter who made a living shooting buffalo and deer and selling them to the construction camps. When the railroad was finished we went prospecting in the Rockies. But I got tired of that life and wanted to see a city again, so I went down to San Francisco and lived among the hoboes on the waterfront for six months . . . Terrible men, Johnnie . . . They would have cut your throat for five cents.'

Tiring of San Francisco, Erik had continued his aimless wandering. The Great War found him in Winnipeg where he enlisted, but having friends in high places he never left the city, his army career, by his own account, being one mad carousal after another. There were also trips home to Norway at wide intervals.

Ere Erik had reached the end of his saga, the empty beer bottles littering the workbench were leering at me in a drunken way. I made the interesting discovery that I could see straight if I closed my right eye. But I couldn't prevent the floor from heaving, the ceiling from sagging, or the walls from bulging in and out. I was drunk . . . there was no doubt about it! Funny how calmly and philosophically one could view the world when feeling like this!

The rickety ladder was a serious obstacle when we rose unsteadily to our feet. However, I pushed Erik from below and he gave me his hand when he reached safety, and we managed somehow.

'C'm up an' have s'm supper, Johnnie,' said Erik, when we reached Main Street.

'At two in the morning! . . . Your wife would throw me down the stairs,' I cried, making my escape with difficulty. Mrs. Black had left the door unlocked. I crept in and undressed without disturbing Hareshaw.

§ 1 v

During the night I was violently sick and the upshot of the whole business was that I was turned out into the street next morning. 'I'm sorry, son, but you'll have to leave,' Mrs. Black said at breakfast time. 'Hareshaw says he's clearin' out if he's got to sleep with yer any longer.'

'If a man can't drink like a gentleman, he's nae business drinkin' at a', declared Hareshaw aggressively, glowering across the table at me.

'Where'll yer go, boy?' asked Mrs. Black anxiously when I left.

'I've no idea,' I replied wearily.

Feeling ill from the effect of the wood-alcohol, I wandered up and down Main Street all day. No money . . . and now nowhere to sleep! God! but it was funny! Damned bad taste of Fate to choose oneself as the chief actor of a comedy like this . . . I'd die before I begged help of the Reimers!

When night came I went to Erik's flat in desperation. Mrs. Berg gave me some food and a couch to sleep on. 'It's all Erik's fault for making you drink when you're not used to it,' she said.

§ v

Next morning after some breakfast with the Bergs I went out into the streets. As the day wore on, hunger, like a great black cloud, blotted the sunlight out of my life. All my former thoughts of great music and future fame; all my philosophizing

about life and the rise and fall of empires, seemed pitifully childish. I was only a hungry animal and had to eat or die!

When I told Luke in the Club that night, that I had no idea where I was going to sleep, he swore loudly and jumping up, made for the office. 'It's all fixed up,' he said on his return. 'You go along to the Club at the C.P.R. subway and they'll give you a bed.'

'But I've got no money,' I cried, shaking my head.

'Hell! You don't have to worry about that,' said Luke roughly. 'Go along and tell them your name and say that you've come from here.'

Immensely relieved, I made my way to the Ex-Servicemen's Club where Puggy had fought the lumberjack. Passing through a crowded bar into a common-room full of tobacco smoke and men shouting to be heard above the general confusion, almost the first person I saw was Red. He was playing pool with tousled hair, eyes bleared and dark-ringed, and haggard face. 'What are you doing here? ... Get out of this,' he snarled when I passed him.

'Go to hell,' I said shortly.

I was given the key of a small bedroom above, and, tired and hungry, I undressed and tumbled into bed.

§ V I

Having eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, I was weak and faint when I went out the following morning. Unless I begged there would be nothing for me to eat that day!

My lunch consisted of a drink of water from the fountain before the City Hall. I tightened my belt. Night found me in the blackest and most hopeless frame of mind I had ever known. Yet, though a spectre rattled fleshless bones at my elbow, life flowed past as though all were well with the world — parties of well-fed, well-dressed people sped by in cars; young couples smiled into each other's eyes as they strolled arm in arm. It was remarkable how much happiness I saw — every

passer-by smiled as if he found life a pleasant affair. Time after time I caught myself staring through restaurant windows at people eating. I felt like a visitor from another planet, so remote was I from all that went on around me. It was then that I discovered my real importance in the scheme of things . . . I was nothing! . . . a dead leaf caught by the wind and whirled down the street was of as much value. And the same was true of all other living souls. Civilization! Progress! Pah! Mere words chattered by wrinkled old monkeys dressed in clothes! It was a colossal farce! Man was but an animal who had to eat or die!

§ V I I

Pocketing my pride, I called on Mrs. Black next morning. When I said I had eaten nothing for two days, she swore and fried an egg for me. 'What the hell's the matter with yer?' she stormed, when Hareshaw came grumbling into the kitchen. 'Christ! Ain't yet got a job an' a roof over yer head an' grub to fill yer guts with? . . . Nothin' but shootin' out yer mouth from mornin' till night . . . never a civil word out of yer. Look at Walker, there. The pore kid's had nothin' to eat for days, an' there he is with a bloody smile on his face.'

My luck turned. Suffolk caught me by the arm when I went into the Army and Navy Club in the evening.

'I've got a little job for you, my boy,' he began. 'It's only for a week . . . but it may prove permanent for you later. I want you to deputize for me in my little cinema in the suburbs. The old Dominion Theatre is being opened up for a fortnight to show a special picture of the Passion for Easter, and I've got the job as organist at sixty dollars a week'.

He explained that the wages in the suburban cinema were paid on a shares basis according to box-office receipts, but it 'meant ten dollars at least for the week.'

I was overjoyed. 'But what about playing jazz for the comedies?' I asked anxiously.

'Pooh! That needn't worry you, my boy,' said the old

fellow, clapping me on the shoulder. 'You're allowed a twenty-minute interval . . . take it during the comedy.'

'Waal! An' what are you two bomb-throwers plottin'?' broke in Luke's voice at our backs.

'Come round to the old Dominion with me, boys, I'm going to have a run over the organ.' Old Suffolk's eyes danced behind his spectacles with excitement.

'Where you bound for?' Luke asked a shabby shifty-eyed acquaintance who stopped him in Main Street.

'Oh, I'm just headin' for a sheebeen down behind Notre Dame,' the stranger replied. 'If the beer's bad I'll fix him . . . but if it's good, I guess I'll let him run on a bit.'

'What did that fellow mean?' I asked Luke as we proceeded.

'Oh, he's a police spy,' said Luke. 'He goes around huntin' up speakeasies, an' keeps the police wide to what's goin' on.'

Luke and Old Suffolk being inclined for a 'pub-crawl' when we left the theatre, I went off to collect some music from my cabin-trunk in the Reimers' basement.

Though the others were cold and contemptuous, Max had the same welcoming smile and warm handshake.

§ V I I I

On the following Monday evening, nervous and excited, with a bundle of music under my arm, I entered Suffolk's little cinema. It was little more than a big wooden hut erected on the edge of the prairie.

The doorkeeper, a big genial Irishman, showed me to a much-battered upright piano.

I played an unsteady march for the News Reel. When a Wild West drama followed, I opened a volume of overtures and played *The Bohemian Girl* and *Martha*. My flurried fingers seemed to play any notes but the right ones. Every minute I expected the audience to rise and howl their indignation. Their patience amazed me. Was it possible that they were unaware of the dreadful mess I was making of the pieces I played?

'Say, boy,' cried the Irish attendant in my ear when I began improvising, that's great stuff. You just hit up that scale as you're doin' when the thriller comes on an' you'll be just dandy.'

When a slapstick comedy flickered above me I rose and spent my twenty minutes interval talking to the Irishman.

'Now hit up that scale,' he called after me when I went back to the piano.

My nervousness having gone by this time, I 'hit up the scale,' threw in handfuls of arpeggios and double-octaves, rumbling tremolos in the bass, prolonged trills in the treble, and worked myself into a musical frenzy.

Afterwards I caught a street-car back to Main Street, had supper in a Chinese café, paying for it with money borrowed from Max, then went to bed to sleep like a log.

§ 1 x

'Gee, boy, what did I tell yer,' cried old Mrs. Black, when I told her about my job. Crowing and chuckling with delight, she made a dish of tea to celebrate the occasion.

The *fräuleins* from the end of the corridor appeared. I was introduced to the decidedly plain and unattractive elder sister. She regarded me with a hostile eye when I smiled on the pretty yellow-haired Julie.

Mrs. Black and the elder sister talked of an 'old Daddy' in Chicago who turned up periodically with expensive presents.

'Ah, but honey, just you wait till yer old Daddy comes back,' Mrs. Black kept crying when the other bemoaned her poverty and the struggle for existence.

As Mrs. Black insisted on my playing to them, we went along to the girls' flat. The top of the upright piano was littered with photographs and knick-knacks. I screwed up my face when I heard the dull flat tone that responded to my touch.

'Who is the singer?' I asked, noting a pile of ragtime songs.

'Julie,' said Mrs. Black. 'Gee, boy, yer oughter 'ear 'er.'

With her sister glowering in the background, Julie was induced to sing in her sweet virginal little soprano, 'Marquita', a sentimental ballad raging at the moment, and a song from *Lilac Time* which had arrived in Winnipeg to set the city humming, 'You are my heart's delight'.

'Say, wouldn't they make a fine pair,' cried Mrs. Black, gazing sentimentally at Julie and I at the piano.

The elder sister gave a tremendous snort.

To drown Mrs. Black's tactless remarks and hide my blushes and confusion, I plunged into a mad extemporization.

'Gee, that was grand,' breathed Mrs. Black when I finished.

'Huh,' snorted the elder sister. 'Call that music . . . It's only a noise . . . I don't like that. A young man used to call here; he could play properly . . . not like that. He went to Germany to study.'

I felt dashed, realizing more than my critic the truth of her words.

'Gee,' cried Mrs. Black, rushing to defend me, 'I bet if yer were in a movie an' heard Walker play like that durin' a thriller yer would be carried away altogether.'

On my way to the cinema that evening I thought about the two German girls. Piecing together the fragments I had heard of their conversation, I realized that Julie was expected to marry a rich husband and so provide for her elder sister. This theory explained all the elder sister's arching of back and unsheathing of claws. 'Well,' I laughed to myself, 'I hope the rich husband comes along for both their sakes.' My thoughts turned to the young man who had gone to Germany. How I envied him! Germany! Where Beethoven, Schumann, Bach, and Wagner had lived, played, and written their music! Where they had suffered and toiled that they might enrich the lives of all who had ears to hear!

§ x

The next time I called on the Bergs I found Harry, the sardonic Oswald, and two strange youths there. Mrs. Berg

introduced me to one of them as Nicolas, her nineteen-year-old brother. The two youths had just been released from Stony Mountain prison.

'It was a shame,' declared Mrs. Berg. 'Putting the boys in prison for two years, just because they took an automobile and went for a run, then left it lying out in the prairie . . . only boys' fun . . . no harm in it at all.'

A desire to be revenged on the social order which had caged him for two of the most impressionable years of his life was written over Nicolas' hardened face and harsh speech. Imprisonment as a cure for adolescent crimes seemed appallingly stupid and cruel.

Mrs. Berg told me something of her family history. Nicolas had been sent to a prison farm for stealing when he was fourteen. Her mother, who was the mistress of a one-legged cobbler, Harry said, had wept over the boy when he had returned thin and worn with the hard treatment meted out to him. Oswald made a little money bootlegging in a small way. Mrs. Berg explained how Erik's nose came to be broken.

'When I told Oswald that Erik struck me once when he had been drinking, Oswald came up here and quarrelled with Erik. Oswald struck Erik, and Erik caught him by the throat and bent him over the table. Oh, I'll never forget that day . . . it was terrible. He tried to break Oswald's back, but Oswald picked up the flower vase and smashed it in Erik's face, breaking his nose.'

The more I saw and heard of this aimless ideal-less type of existence, the more I found myself drawing aloof with my dreams and ambitions. One had to have something to hold on to in this life, to prevent the terrible undercurrents of depravity surging below the seemingly calm surface of civilized existence sucking one under! It would be better to strive and fail as a concert-pianist than to live like those people!

Mrs. Berg's father had been an hotel proprietor who had forced her to marry Erik when she was seventeen years old. Erik then had been a tall slim handsome fellow of thirty. 'When my father died,' she said, 'the trustees swindled my mother out of everything and we never got a cent . . . It was

terrible . . . We had been used to such nice things and having lots of friends around us . . . but when we had no money our friends all went away.'

§ x i

On Saturday night I received nine dollars for my week's work at the cinema. Max refused to take back the five dollars I had borrowed from him. 'Gee, Jim, don't I just know what it's like to walk about the streets,' he said, pushing my hand aside.

During the following week I was told that my room was required for somebody else. Before leaving the Ex-Servicemen's Club I met Red again, looking more debauched than ever. He had picked up a fat flashy-looking Glaswegian, who, he explained, had come out West to try his luck with five hundred pounds in his pocket. In return for his keep and drinks, Red was showing his new friend round Winnipeg.

When I was introduced to the red-faced ex-bookie, he extended a flabby hand and talked about Glasgow in a husky whisky-laden voice. 'I've had a bit of luck,' he said. 'I was left some money, so I thought I would chance coming out to Canada.'

Wondering where I would sleep that night I went to the Army and Navy Club.

'Come to my hotel and I'll speak to them about a room,' said old Suffolk. 'They tell me you played very well,' he began, referring to the cinema. 'But the manager would rather have an organist than a pianist . . . people are crying out for organs in cinemas just now . . . Why, I don't know . . . But, there it is, and managers are naturally anxious to please their patrons. There is a schoolboy of sixteen who played for me some time ago; he knows something about the organ. The manager is trying to persuade his mother to get him to take the job, but she isn't keen, and nothing is settled yet, so there's still a chance of your getting the job permanently. It's a pity you don't play the organ,' said the old fellow earnestly. 'I must have you out to my church to give you a few lessons.'

§ x i i

The hotel Suffolk had lived in for twenty odd years, was a dingy four-storied building on the north side of Market Street. My companion introduced me to the tall lean man behind the counter in the entrance hall. For two dollars a week, paid in advance, he could give me a room. I handed over two dollars and signed the visitors' book.

While Suffolk and the clerk had a few words in private I glanced curiously around. Half a dozen men were slumped in the row of chairs ranged along the window and facing the street. Lean brown-faced men, who had spent most of their lives in mining and construction camps, they stared at me with hard eyes set in expressionless faces. Now and then a brown stream of tobacco juice was squirted into one of the sawdust-filled boxes on the floor. There was a flavour of romance about the dingy, dusty place. It had a past! It had known the great boom years! Gold-fevered men had slept under its roof during their hurried and often fatal pilgrimage to the Klondyke!

I was led up a flight of dark stairs to a long dim corridor lined with many doors. 'Here you are,' said the clerk genially, pushing open the door of a tiny bedroom.

When alone I lay down on the bed and closed my eyes. My mind, stimulated by the musty old hotel, busied itself with the past. The proper time to have come to Canada was in the Klondyke days, and when the 'Great Lone Land' was opened up! There were great things to be done then! Why had I been born in an age of chaos and growing stagnation? 'Hell!' I said aloud, as a host of morbid thoughts crowded in on me, 'what's the use of thinking?'

I sought the brightly-lit sidewalks of Main Street and the pageantry of its cosmopolitan night life. There was something reassuring in life in the mass! It was better rubbing shoulders with one's fellow creatures than lying alone in a dim frowsty bedroom!

Now and then Harvesters stopped to ask how I fared, or

contented themselves with a wave and 'Hoo are ye gettin' on, Professor?' as they passed.

A gust of warm air laden with the fragrant odour of coffee, the choking fumes of cheap tobacco, and the smell of unwashed clothes met me when I pushed open the swing doors of a little Chinese café where one could get a cup of coffee and two buns for five cents. 'Hello, Professor, how's the world abusin' ye?' a dozen voices hailed me with.

Seated on a high stool at the lunch counter I lingered as long as possible over my coffee, listening with interest to a group of debating Harvesters. Hammering the table with the palms of their hands, shouting one another down, half-rising in their seats, quivering with eagerness to ram their opinions down the other man's throat, they argued on Communism, the Great War, Glasgow, football, Canada, and life from varied angles.

§ X I I I

'Come into my room,' said Suffolk next morning. 'I'm repairing an old organ.' With a bed, an upright piano whose top was one solid mass of photographs, piles of music, old newspapers and journals littering chairs and corners, and a table jammed against a wall with a large map of the Dominion hanging above it, the little room seemed absolutely crammed.

'I have stayed in this room for more than twenty years,' the old fellow said, getting down on his knees before an American organ, which lay on its back with the reeds exposed. Setting to work with a screwdriver, he puffed and cursed for a time. Straightening his back to light a cigarette, Suffolk handed me a newspaper and pointing to a photograph which accompanied an article about a 'golden wedding' which had been celebrated near Lake Manitoba, said, 'That's my father and mother'.

When I expressed surprise that his parents should be so old Suffolk asked me to guess his age.

'About forty-five,' I hazarded, gazing at his red boyish cheeks and greying hair.

'Add twenty years to that and you'll be right,' he chuckled.

His parents had emigrated when he was a boy and settled on a farm in Northern Manitoba where they still lived. Suffolk mystified me. His M.P.S. diploma hung on the wall above the piano, but what use of it he had ever made I never learned. From his conversation, music was Suffolk's whole life.

'I'll take you to our choir rehearsal on Wednesday night and give you a few tips on the organ . . . a nice little two manual instrument with pneumatic action,' he said, telling me that he played in a Lutheran Church. 'I get five dollars a Sunday. There isn't much money attached to an organistship in Canada, but the work is light, and it pays your living expenses.'

§ x i v

The mildness of the air and the knowledge that winter was behind me, raised my spirits when I went along to Erik's cinema that evening.

'Come in, Johnnie,' cried Erik, pleased to see me.

Bromley said he would take me to see a woman the next afternoon who had a son keen to learn music. 'We'll see how many pupils we can get you, Johnnie,' he cried exuberantly. 'I would like to see you getting on. I'm tired of playing and teaching, and want to get back to my own business. You must come and have supper with my wife and I some night soon.'

When the cinema emptied, Erik and I went down into the grimy basement as before.

'I'll just have a bottle of beer, thanks,' I said, when Erik drew a flask of wood-alcohol from his hip-pocket.

'Have you ever read the "Kreutzer Sonata"?' began Erik, when we were seated on an upturned beer-case each. When I shook my head, he told me that according to Tolstoi, Beethoven's 'Kreutzer Sonata' was nothing but a piece of musical pornography.

'But Beethoven was a noble character,' I cried, horrified

by this blasphemy. 'And who was Tolstoi, anyway, to pose as a musical critic?'

'Tolstoi said it was a filthy composition.'

'Well, Tolstoi must have listened with a filthy mind.'

'You ought to read the "Kreutzer Sonata", Johnnie,' said Erik good humouredly. He proceeded to tell me, with a wealth of unprintable detail, about a girl of seventeen who had spent a large part of the evening in his office. In a reminiscent mood, Erik retailed former conquests, dwelling on one affair in particular. 'The last time I went back to Norway, Johnnie, I met a chorus-girl in Kristiania. Oh, she was beautiful . . . what a figure! . . . Here is a photo I took of her in a friend's studio.' Erik produced a pocket-book and handed me a photograph. Looking at the nude fleshy female, I handed it back without a word. Looking at Erik seated on his beer-case, forearms resting on his great thighs, it occurred to me that the pink-cheeked sensual Harry might be debauching his wife at that very moment. There was a kind of vast humour in it all!

I wondered how long Erik would live at his present pace. With red-rimmed baggy eyes, lined and sagging face, and slack flabby body, he looked a man of fifty instead of thirty odd.

'Why don't you commercialize your art like other people, Johnnie?' asked Erik, switching round the conversation.

'What do you mean?'

'Well, we could run a concert in this place some afternoon. Say it's for some Jewish charity and you'll fill the place . . . We've done it before. We could advertise on the screen, hand two or three dollars to charity and go fifty-fifty with the rest of the proceeds. You could play piano solos, and I could get an old Russian 'cellist who played at the Czar's court before the Revolution, to come in with us . . . Let's go an' see him now, Johnnie,' said Erik, heaving himself upright and making for the rickety ladder.

'But he'll be in bed fast asleep,' I cried.

'We'll wake him up if he is,' replied Erik.

Save for an occasional belated auto the city slept.

'Now le's go'n see this man, Johnnie,' said Erik after locking up. 'Used to play at the court of Czar, Johnnie . . . he's very poor now an'll be glad to help us . . . lives 'long Selkirk Avenue this way.'

Stopping before a two-story house, Erik began hammering at the door, the sound of his fist thundering through the darkened interior.

'They'll all be asleep,' I said, glancing apprehensively up and down the street to see if there was a policeman about.

A window shot up above our heads and an apparition in white leaned out, demanding our business in a hoarse middle-aged feminine voice.

Erik lifted his cap gallantly, and asked if the 'cellist was at home.

'He ain't livin' here now,' screeched the figure at the window. 'Get away, you drunken bums, or I'll call the police . . . gettin' respectable folks outa bed at this time of night.'

The window slammed down and silence reigned again.

'Pity, Johnnie,' said Erik. 'He was nice ole fellow. Le's go'n see Hammer . . . newspaper man, great frien' . . . fine fellow . . . he'll give us a boost.'

Erik swayed into Salter Street. Every now and then I had to support him while he stopped and bent down, muttering, 'My s'pender's slipped, Johnnie.'

After waking up another household, Erik drew a second blank. 'Moved to another part of the town, Johnnie . . . nice fellow . . . pity you didn't meet him,' he said, when he rejoined me. 'Come and have supper with me, Johnnie,' Erik cried, as we crossed the footbridge over the C.P.R. freight-yards.

'Lord no!' I exclaimed. 'What on earth would your wife say if I appeared at this time of morning?'

'Now, Johnnie, you're coming with me,' declared Erik, seizing my arm in a determined manner.

Dressing-gown thrown over pyjamas, eyes blinking sleepily, and suppressing a yawn, Mrs. Berg opened the door.

'This is a fine time to come home,' she began warmly, then paused on catching sight of me.

Come in, Johnnie,' Erik waved to me.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself,' scolded his wife, swinging away as Erik slipped his arm round her thin shoulders. 'Coming in half-drunk and teachin' a boy bad habits.'

'C'mon, m'dear, le's have some supper, then you c'n tell us all 'bout it,' mumbled Erik, like a big amiable bear.

After rating us soundly, Mrs. Berg resumed her usual bright manner and set cold beef and pickles, bread and butter, and a bottle of Erik's beloved saurkraut before us. Erik was a charming host. He was a true aristocrat and had no need of luxurious surroundings to shine. Unlike the extremely class-conscious Scots I had been reared among, Erik never referred to his financial state or tried to explain away his poverty.

§ x v

'You can beat me at your particular kind of playing, but when it comes to this kind of music I am in my own element and can lay down the law,' declared old Suffolk, as we rose from the piano in the Army and Navy Club after attempting to play the 'Light Cavalry' overture as a duet.

We sat down at a table, and, after lecturing me on my uncertain tempo, Suffolk said, 'I have a choice of three cinema jobs just now. I am doing my best to get you one, and I've mentioned your name to several people, but I'm going to keep the best job for myself.'

The click of the billiard balls mingled with the low hum of voices; the sun, shining from a cloudless sky, threw dusty beams across the room; Suffolk, nodding familiarly to each newcomer, puffed contentedly at his cigarette.

'Well, boy, how's tricks?' came Luke's voice, and a clap on the back awakened me from a daydream.

'Pupils,' said Luke when I talked of my new prospects. He rasped his chin thoughtfully and toyed with his glass. 'I'll speak to some of the family men that work around me in the freight-yards. The guy that sits at my desk wants me

to take you along to his place for supper some night soon . . . He's got a big family.'

'We'll have you fixed up yet, my boy,' beamed old Suffolk.

That afternoon Bromley and I walked down a suburban avenue lined with frame working-class houses.

'Now, Johnnie,' said Bromley, 'leave the talking to me. I'll fix it all for you. I'll tell this boy's mother that you're one of the most brilliant young men the Old Country has ever turned out.'

'But, good Lord!' I cried aghast, 'she'll know I'm not when-ever I begin to play.'

'Now, Johnnie,' began my companion earnestly, 'you're in Canada now, and you've simply got to get all this inferiority-complex business out of your system. You know far more about music than I'll ever know . . . I know nothing about music, yet I can bluff them. Leave this business to me and you'll see.'

Bromley stopped before a house and opened the garden gate. With fast-beating heart I followed him up the few yards of path to the door. A pleasant motherly-looking woman welcomed us and ushered us into a spotless sitting-room.

A boy with a friendly manner, nearly six feet tall, though only fourteen years old, was introduced as my prospective pupil.

'Play something and let Mrs. Reed hear what you can do,' said Bromley, seating himself on the sofa beside the other two.

'This boy's a wonder pianist,' I heard him say as I drew a ripple of sound from the piano. I almost burst out laughing at the awed tone he feigned.

I plunged into a wild chaotic improvisation which set the windows rattling. Bromley accompanied it with such a stream of extravagant praise that the business was settled there and then.

'I am only too willing to turn my pupils over to such a genius as this,' he declared as we made our departure, after arranging the first lesson for the following week at a fee of one dollar per lesson.

'By jove, you didn't forget to pitch it strong to that poor woman,' I said, when we reached the street.

'Oh, that's all right, Johnnie,' laughed Bromley. 'They like to think they're getting somebody wonderful to teach their dirty-nosed brats. The people here know absolutely nothing about art. The more you make it sound like a fairy-tale, the more they think of you. It's easier to fool people about things like music out here, than in the Old Country.'

Bromley cut me short when I began stammering a few words of thanks. 'Johnnie,' he said earnestly, 'I'm only too thankful to be rid of the brats. If I was to be doing much more piano-teaching I would be cutting some of their wretched little throats.'

§ x v i

Suffolk took me to his choir practice on the Wednesday night of that week. On our return to the Army and Navy Club we met Luke, who had news for me.

'The guy that works beside me says he would like his kid taught music, an' he wants to lay a proposition before you,' he said. 'We'll go and see him right now.' Luke tossed off the remainder of his beer and rose to his feet.

'He's one of those religious ginks,' Luke informed me, as we entered a street of decayed dwelling houses off Portage Avenue. 'But he's got two damn fine daughters.'

A short steep flight of steps led to the door of the house.

Mrs. Bradford, a big handsome grey-haired woman, showed us into a sitting-room whose furniture was worn and shabby. Mr. Bradford, tall and sombre, rose from an armchair, and, as he shook hands, looked at me keenly from under shaggy brows. In a deep grave voice he questioned me about my wanderings in Canada.

The two girls Luke had spoken of entered the room, and a babble of introductions and general talk followed. Norah, the elder, was a gypsy-looking girl of twenty-four, slim and athletic, with brown piercing eyes like her mother. Lilian was the same age as myself; much fairer, prettier, and sunnier.

A tall thin youth who charged in was introduced as Paul; a fresh-faced eager lad of eighteen. Sheila was a shy illusive girl of twelve; and Leslie, a serious small boy of thirteen.

Norah, who sat on the worn carpet, with her head resting against her father's chair, asked me to play to them.

For the best part of an hour I played through my scanty repertoire and improvised.

'Now Sheila,' cried Mrs. Bradford, 'wouldn't you like to be able to play the piano like that? You'll have to work hard at your practice when you've got Mr. Walker for a teacher.'

'What do you think of Canada, Mr. . . .? Oh, I can't call you Mr. . . . What is your christian name?' babbled the impulsive Lilian.

'Lilian,' cried her mother in a shocked voice.

'Well, what's wrong with asking him his name?' sniffed her daughter, with a rebellious toss of her bobbed hair.

'Jim,' she repeated. Screwing up her face thoughtfully, she studied me with her head to one side. 'No,' she said, 'I'm going to call you Jimmy, whether you like it or not.'

'Oh, oh, oh, I'm going to tell Jack about this,' cried Norah, wagging an accusing forefinger.

'Huh, what do I care . . . I like Jimmy.'

My blushes caused great hilarity.

'How many pupils have you got?' Mr. Bradford asked me, when the womenfolk had gone to prepare supper.

'Only one just now, but I've got prospects of two more next week,' I replied.

'How much do you charge for a lesson?'

'One dollar.'

Mr. Bradford closed his eyes and thought for a moment before reaching a decision. 'Look here,' he began, 'I know your position, and it's not good for a young man to walk about the streets of a city like this without a home and respectable folk around him to keep him straight. Now, I'd like to help you, but mind you, I'm not prepared to lose anything by it; I want to make that clear at the beginning . . . My proposition is this. Next week we're moving to a bigger house . . . if you care, you can come and stay with us . . . not for nothing, mark

you! . . . You'll be charged ten dollars a week. What you earn now you'll hand over to my wife at the end of every week, and the balance owing will be carried forward until you're in a position to pay it up. It's a purely business proposition, mark you . . . I'm not offering you charity.' Mr. Bradford jabbed his pipe towards me to emphasize his words. 'If you come you'll be treated as one of the family, and you'll be expected to do your share of the work about the house — carrying in coals from the yard, chopping wood and that sort of thing. Now, I've laid the proposition before you and you can take it or leave it.'

Having but three dollars between me and starvation, and seeing possibilities of seven or eight hours' daily piano-practice ahead, outwardly calm, but inwardly trembling with joy at my good fortune, I accepted Mr. Bradford's offer.

'You'll come here on Monday morning and help shift the furniture,' said Mr. Bradford authoritatively.

'You'll be fine and dandy in that place,' said Luke, on our way back to Market Square. 'Gee, I wish I was goin' to live there myself. What do you think of the black-haired filly? . . . Gee! What wouldn't I give to spend a night with that one . . . Some fire there if she was roasted.'

Consumed with eagerness to begin teaching and practising I paid little heed to Luke's rhapsodies.

§ x v i i

The next time I visited the Bergs, Erik was out, and the flat was crowded. Harry and Oswald were enthusiastically making plans for the summer. They were aiming at jobs as waiters at the C.P.R. hotel at Banff. 'All the bigwads from the States go there, there would be big tips,' said Oswald eagerly.

The two young ex-convicts talked of the Lake-boats on Lake Superior, where Nicolas had sailed before.

Feeling that I had seen enough of low life, I left the flat after a few minutes. A wave of heat rising from the cement

sidewalk reminded me that May was only a few days off. Looking up at the warm sun I sang within myself.

At the Carnegie Library I read the newspapers and an article on the 'Tea-Pot Dome' oil scandal in an American journal. Now that I was going to be a respectable citizen again, it was my duty to take an interest in the affairs of the world.

At the Army and Navy Club in the evening, Luke related some of Suffolk's exploits as an organist.

'Gee, one time they were havin' a special service, with a bishop from Minneapolis — great singers, and all the rest of it. Gosh, when the time came to begin they found they had no organist. When Suffolk didn't turn up after waitin' half an hour, they began to think maybe he'd taken ill and some of them went to his hotel. When they forced open his bedroom door, there was the old boy, snorin' away, with half a dozen empty bottles on the table . . . Boy, but there was a row that day.'

'But didn't they throw him out?' I asked the chuckling Luke.

'No sir, not them. There was another time. We had been hittin' up the booze all Saturday night, right on into Sunday, so we took Suffolk to church just to see him right. 'Get me to the organ boys before the congregation comes in, and I'll be right as rain,' he says. We hoisted him up into his seat an' left him there fine and dandy. Gee! if he didn't fall down among the pedals right in the middle of a prayer. Boy, the row he made! An' to hear him play you couldn't 've guessed he was too drunk to stand on his feet.'

That night I was kept awake for a time by a light shining through the fanlight above my bedroom door. A guarded conversation between an old woman of gayish ways and a lean hard-faced Canadian occupying adjacent rooms opposite me, led to the opening and closing of doors, hoarse giggles, and the drawing of corks and filling of glasses.

I fell asleep muttering:

'Now Tam, O Tam! Had they been queans
A' plump and strapping, in their teens
. . . But withered beldams, auld and droll.'

§ XVIII

On our return from church on Sunday, old Suffolk said something to the tobacco-chewers in the hotel, about not being at church on such a lovely spring morning.

'You say there is no God,' he said, when one of the men passed a cynical remark. 'But I know there is a God.'

'Waal, an' how d'ye know?' sneered the ragged atheist.

'I know,' was Suffolk's gentle reply, 'because everything around me tells me so. I know whenever I go into the country and see the trees and the beasts in the fields and the flowers in the grass. And I know when I look up at the stars at night and see the wonders in the skies . . . All these things tell me that there is a God. You have only to open your eyes to all the beauty in the world to be convinced that it was created by a Higher Power.'

Spitting derisively into the sawdust-boxes, Suffolk's listeners maintained that 'life was one hell-of-a-fight, and that the one who grabbed most was the winner.'

CHAPTER XII

§ 1

THE house the Bradfords moved into, stood in an avenue off Broadway, in what had been a 'respectable district' during the *fin de siècle*. The roof of the eight-roomed house sagged; the foundations had sunk several inches at one corner, giving the whole structure a rakish tilt; the woodwork shrieked out for paint, and in places had crumbled into dust; in a pocket-handkerchief of front garden sprouted a few scattered tufts of grass.

During breakfast on the morning after the removal, I studied the Bradford *menage*. The father dominated the household. His moralizings reminded me of the father in *Swiss Family Robinson*. Norah and Lilian were fiercely independent, and Paul was too full of animal spirits to be overawed, so the two children had to bear the brunt of the impromptu sermons their father revelled in.

Listening to the deep voice of the man at the head of the table saying grace, I wondered what had turned his mind into this pious eyes-rolling-to-heaven channel. Since mental light first dawned on my childish mind, I had been sceptical of the anthropological conception of God as a superman with a long flowing white beard and a testy temper.

'When I first came to Canada, I had a hard struggle,' he informed me, with the air of a man who was proud of the position he had won for himself. 'Nobody helped me. My first job was with a cheese merchant in Montreal. I had to load trucks with cheeses that were so heavy that I could hardly lift them. And I didn't get much for the job either.'

Mr. Bradford's tone implied that I knew nothing at all about hard work and being thrown on my own resources. It struck me that Mr. Bradford was not very intelligent.

His sunny natured wife smiled proudly. The others, having

heard about the cheeses since they were babies, paid no attention, they argued, and slanged one another and drew me into their youthful conversation. But for the dark brooding face of the father I would have been perfectly happy.

§ 11

'Gee! I'm sure glad to hear you're gettin' a start made teachin' piano,' said Max, pumping my hand delightedly when I told him about the Bradfords. 'Sure, I'll run your trunk round in the ole boat if you come round about seven.'

Next I called on Mrs. Black. 'Say, boy! That's real fine,' she squawked, when I retailed my news. 'I was beginnin' to wonder what had happened to yer, son.'

When I inquired how things fared with her she pulled a wry face. 'Aw, that big — Hareshaw,' she began. 'I've got a new boarder . . . a lady barber she calls 'erself . . . Peugh! . . . She's only a bloody chippie. An' Hareshaw makin' a fool of himself . . . Buyin' her presents. An' him with a wife an' kids in the Old Country. He thinks he can fool me.' Mrs. Black snorted. 'But I'm not blind; no, nor deaf either . . . Creepin' into 'er bedroom in the middle of the night.'

Thinking I had wasted enough time I hurried back to the Bradfords to practise finger-exercises and scales.

Scales! scales! scales! Major scales and minor scales; diatonic and chromatic scales; scales in octaves, thirds, sixths, and tenths; in similar and in contrary motion; in double octaves, double thirds, and double sixths!

My shoulders ached and my mind was numbed by supper-time. Over the meal the family argued and squabbled about the disposition of the furniture — everybody having their own ideas on the subject.

Jack Grahame, Lilian's fiancé, called at the end of the meal. A medium sized, pleasant-faced young man with well oiled fair hair, neatly dressed in a light grey suit. He talked to me in a friendly manner about Scotland, of which he had only childhood memories.

The sky was full of lowering nimbus cloud and the streets wet and gleaming, when Max and I returned with my trunk.

Max's frank open face and cheerful manner captivated the family instantly. 'Say, Jim,' he cried, when I went out to the car with him afterwards. 'You sure have all the luck . . . That's a swell pair of dames in there.'

As Max pressed down the self-starter, I laughed and said, 'I've got a long way to go before I start thinking of girls.'

'Aw, g'wan! Say! you'll be makin' a wad of dough before you know where you are, an' next thing, I'll be sayin' "Hullo" to the wife an' kids,' scoffed Max, racing the engine. 'Sure boy, I'll be back here again,' he cried, driving off with a broad wink.

'That was a nice young fellow,' said Bradford, when I returned to the house. 'How did you get to know him?'

'But can't those people help you?' he went on when I explained. 'Surely, if you know them so well, they would do all they could to help you?'

'But they did help me,' I replied, flushing hotly under the suspicious gaze of my inquisitor. Canada, I understood, was not a country where one could admit a stranger into one's home with impunity, but that knowledge was unable to prevent me from feeling acutely self-conscious when Mr. Bradford watched my every movement and noted my every word.

§ 111

'Technique, technique, and technique, — the three most essential things for a great pianist' — the words were deeply engraved on my mind.

Having no money for lessons I was determined to teach myself. Lifting each finger slowly and deliberately as high as possible, and bringing it down with a smart blow on the key, and listening with intense concentration to the tone thus produced, I began my next day's piano practice.

After half an hour's 'finger drill', I played scales and arpeggios for an hour — there seemed to me no better way of

acquiring agility and an intimate knowledge of the keyboard. Then I worked on the C major Fugue, in Book I of Bach's *Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues*, and on Chopin's C minor (Revolutionary) Étude.

Two hours later I opened my bulky volume of Beethoven's Sonatas, with the reverence of a Covenanter opening his Bible.

§ 1 v

In the afternoon I went out to teach. My chief thought as I walked along Broadway, was, 'Will I be denounced as a charlatan?' I felt horribly incompetent, but the spice of adventure in my situation buoyed me up. If I got lots of pupils I would take lessons from a good teacher! I would rent a suite in a good office-block and furnish it as a studio! I would do all sorts of things!

The sun was bright and its warmth pleasant. I crossed the C.P.R. freight-yards by the footbridge and entered a region of shabby frame shacks, where thin pale-faced women sat reading or sewing on rocking-chairs in verandas, one eye on the brown lusty youngsters rolling in the dusty road.

The streets improved, they became lined with trees, vividly green with their spring foliage. Tall slim boys and willowy girls in light spring frocks loitered homewards from school, books under their arms.

I stopped before the house of a Polish Jew. Bromley had arranged everything by 'phone. The maid showed me into a large room on the ground floor, bare of furniture, save for a music-stand in the middle of the uncarpeted floor, beside which lay a violin-case; there were two plain chairs, and an upright piano commanding a clear view of the street.

In the curtained opening at one end of the room, where the end of a dining-room table projected into view, appeared a stocky, dark-haired, dark-skinned, girl. 'I guess you're my new piano teacher,' she said in a cool voice. The brisk way she advanced, then stopped to look me up and down, increased my nervousness.

'Better begin with technical work,' I told myself during a moment of panic. Calming myself, I questioned the seventeen year old Pole on the progress of her musical studies and got her seated at the piano.

I began to outline my technical theories and spoke at length of the absolute necessity of training the fingers, through the medium of exercises, scales, and studies, to obey the mind. Uttering an exclamation of disgust, my pupil turned an indignant face towards me and said testily, 'I don't want to be bothered with all that stuff. . . I want to play pieces.'

'Well,' I replied, feeling my face burn, 'I don't see how you are going to play pieces without technique.'

To ease the situation I asked her to play something.

'I want to learn this piece,' she said, opening a 'Globe Folio' at Suppé's 'Poet and Peasant' overture. 'Mr. Bromley played it beautifully at the movies one night. How do you count those black notes after the dotted ones?' she asked, pointing to the first bar.

Bending over her shoulder, I saw that the music was scrawled all over with the pencillings of former teachers.

'The teacher I had before Mr. Bromley told me to count "One-and-two-and",' she went on. 'But I don't like counting that way. Do you know any other way of counting time?'

I felt cornered. 'Let me hear you play it,' I said evasively, playing for time.

Without the merest glimmerings of musicianship, she thumped out the first page, hurrying on where she knew the notes, and pulling up and stumbling when she felt in difficulty.

'Wouldn't it be better to begin with something a little simpler and work up to pieces like this by degrees?' I suggested, when at last she broke down completely.

'But I don't want to work at simpler things,' she cried petulantly. 'I want to play this.'

'Yes, yes,' I agreed hurriedly.

'Play it to me,' she said, rising from the stool.

My pupil listened with a dissatisfied expression on her face. 'Mr. Bromley didn't play it like that,' she said when I finished. 'He played it loud and made it sound fine.'

'Yes, I expect he did,' I said, highly incensed. 'But we haven't all got piano touches like cab-horses clattering up and down the keyboard.' How the deuce could I bring this nightmarish lesson to an end!

'How do you count the quick notes?' she persisted, eyeing me suspiciously.

'Well,' I said, perspiring freely, and inwardly cursing my musical intuition which had enabled me to dispense with complicated systems of counting time, 'I count four in the bar and just fill in the semiquavers like this' . . . demonstrating on the piano as I spoke.

Somehow the hour went by.

'We'll 'phone when the next lesson will be,' said the Pole, handing me a dollar bill.

'Thank the Lord that's over,' I breathed on regaining the street.

The house Bromley had taken me to the week before was my next call. There, I was able to talk about technique to my heart's content, with my six-foot pupil drinking in my words and expressing his eagerness to follow out my instructions. To work at with his scales and exercises, I gave him Beethoven's little 'Minuet in G', and, asking his mother to buy him a book of Rudiments of Music, pocketed my dollar, feeling that I had regained some of the self-respect I had lost earlier in the afternoon.

'I've good news for you, Jimmy,' cried Lilian that evening.

'Good news?' I echoed.

'Yes, two new pupils. Jack says his mother wants you to teach his sisters. One's fourteen . . . Gee, but she's pretty; you're not to fall in love with her, mind! . . . The other's five.'

I was happy during my solitary evening walk along Assiniboine Avenue to Osborne Bridge. My luck seemed to have altered completely!

Next afternoon I found that the Army and Navy Club had been burned down. A group of members stared dejectedly at the blackened ruins and discussed the catastrophe in low tones.

'It happened in the night,' the little clarinettist told me.

'Nobody knows how the fire broke out . . . an awful business . . . We've lost everything.'

'What will the Club do now?' I asked.

'They've fixed up a temporary clubroom a block or two away. I'm going round there now if you'd like to come.'

On the way, the clarinettist talked in a depressed way about his long spell of unemployment. 'We're living in tough times,' he said. 'I've got a wife and kids to look after, and if the boys at the Club hadn't stood by me, I don't know what would have happened.'

We arrived at the office suite the committee had hurriedly rented. A bar had already been fitted up; even a piano had been hired. Suffolk bewailed the loss of the Broadwood grand to a new bartender. 'A terrible business,' he said to me. 'A beautiful instrument . . . just a heap of ashes . . . When I think of the number of times I have played on that piano' . . . Breaking off with a sad shake of the head, Suffolk raised his glass to his lips.

'Go on, boy, that's good stuff,' cried the bartender, vaulting the counter and coming up to me when I began to play the piano. When I rose, he sat down and played a snappy jazz tune which evoked a round of applause.

'He's a good boy,' Suffolk said to me. 'He won't stay here long. That's the kind of music people want . . . They don't understand the things you play. They appreciate your talent and ability, but your music is too far above their heads, they want music that they can grasp without any trouble.'

I nodded in agreement. But how could I change my nature? Music was only a medium through which I tried to express what I felt about life and the world around me! I had no

desire to tickle the ears of unthinking people with trivial dance tunes!

'Sheila was in love with you,' laughed Mrs. Bradford during supper. 'Now that you're her teacher she says she hates you.'

I expressed sorrow at Sheila's fickleness.

'Never mind, Jimmy,' cried Lilian. 'I'll take lessons from you, and I'll promise not to hate you.'

'You watch her, Jimmy,' warned Norah. 'Jack's jealous . . . They've had a row about you already.'

'Why? I ejaculated. 'He's got nothing to be jealous about.'

'Maybe not so far as you're concerned; but he thinks Lilian isn't to be trusted with a young man about the house.'

'Say!' hooted Paul. 'Ain't they a couple boneheaded saps. They think all the guys in this burg're crazy about them. Gee! it'd've sure got to be a set of nit-wits that fell for you two.'

I felt a growing affection for Paul.

§ V I

The third and last of Bromley's pupils came next afternoon. 'She practises four hours a day,' he said over the 'phone, 'the only one of the lot that's any good.'

'You hear that, Sheila?' cried Mrs. Bradford, when I talked about the new pupil during lunch. 'There's a little girl coming to-day who practises four hours a day. What have you to say about that?'

Sheila glowered. Since my appearance on her childish horizon, Sheila's tattered 'Hemy's Tutor' had become a thing accursed.

I was practising the Chopin 'Revolutionary' Étude, when Mrs. Bradford ushered in a vivid black-haired Pole, small, and in her teens.

'I'm quite safe, ain't I?' she giggled apprehensively, when we were alone. She fluttered the long black lashes shading her brown eyes disconcertingly.

'Safe!' I echoed in astonishment.

She nodded with a nervous little laugh and a languishing upward glance, which had clearly been practised before a mirror.

'They say the old ones are worse than the young ones, don't they?' she went on cryptically, displaying a set of beautiful teeth in a confidential smile.

What the deuce was she raving about? 'Well, come on, let's hear what you've been doing at the piano,' I said briskly.

When I began expounding my theories on technique and touch, my pupil wriggled impatiently and started to tell me how 'nice' Mr. Bromley had been. Her languishing looks set me blushing furiously and made me concentrate more keenly on the lesson. Finally, finding me an unresponsive chunk of Scottish granite, the Polish maiden grew huffy. When she handed me my fee, she said shortly that she 'would 'phone me when the next lesson would be'.

There was more in piano-teaching than met the eye! I had lost two pupils already!

§ V I I

That evening I went to the Y.M.C.A. I was afraid to go near Erik's cinema again. It required little imagination to visualize the reception I would meet with if I returned to the Bradfords after an evening in Erik's grimy basement.

The sound of the piano reached my ears when I passed through the swing doors leading to the entrance hall. In the player, I recognized the slim immaculate figure of the young pianist I had argued so fiercely with on questions of piano-forte 'touch'.

The pianist smiled and gave me a nod of recognition when I approached the Steinway grand.

'What was that?' I asked, when the rippling Chopinesque composition came to an end.

'Don't you know that piece? . . . That was Chopin's "Fantasie Impromptu" in C sharp minor. I thought everyone

knew that composition through reading De Maurier's *Trilby*.'

'I'm afraid I have never read *Trilby*,' I confessed. 'Though I did see a film version of it once, now that I remember.'

This fair-haired youth seemed, with his clear decisive speech and calm outlook, to be the antithesis of myself, with my groping perplexed thoughts, and rash, impulsive speech and actions. I envied him his poise, his cultured voice, and well-stored mind.

When I begged him to play the Chopin 'Fantasie' again, he played with a dazzling rapidity and wonderful delicacy of touch.

'Splendid,' I cried.

'What are you doing now?' he asked me, thanking me with a smile.

'Trying to gather enough pupils round me to enable me to live,' I replied. 'But it's uphill work,' I shrugged.

The young pianist nodded sympathetically. 'If I was right up against it and in your place,' he said, leaning back and locking his long sensitive fingers round one knee, 'I wouldn't stay five minutes in Winnipeg . . . I would go to the States and tour the small Middle West towns, calling myself Igor Ikymoscovitch, or something like that.'

'Would you really?'

'Why not? . . . Others do it and get away with it. Why not you or I? . . . Say you studied at the Prague Conservatoire — there isn't one there, but no one is to know that . . . Improvise! Throw dust in their eyes! . . . Tell them you are playing Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, Schumann! . . . It would mean prostituting your art, but one has to live.'

I shook my head slowly. 'No, I couldn't live as a charlatan. Think of the constant fear of being found out.'

We fell to talking of our daily practice.

'Oh, never!' cried my companion in horror, when I told him I had an hour's scale-practice every day. 'Never play scales unless just to get to know them. Nothing is more deadening than playing scales by the hour . . . Up and down, up and down,' he caricatured the scale of C major as played by an earnest but untalented schoolgirl. 'Bach is the finest

thing of all for one's technique. You get everything you need in "Das Wohltemperirte Klavier". I practise the first Fugue, in Book I, all day long.'

'Why, I practise that Fugue myself just now,' I cried.

'Do you,' said the young pianist delightedly. 'Isn't it difficult? Do you know, there isn't a pianist in Winnipeg who can play that Fugue from memory. No, not one.'

'But it's not so terribly difficult,' I objected. 'I believe I could memorize it myself in a fortnight.'

'It's got "four voices", remember, and seventeen entries of the Subject in the second page.' With the air of a man assured of an easy victory, my new friend said, 'I'll stand you the finest dinner to be had in Winnipeg on the day you play the Fugue from memory to me with the proper interpretation. No, never mind the interpretation . . . if you play the written notes alone.'

'Let me see the piano,' I said, moved to action by this challenge. Very softly, and with a little crescendo on the rising quavers, I began to play the Subject of the Fugue. With intense concentration I tried to visualize the printed page as I brought in entry and entry of the Subject, until all the four melodic threads were weaving that intricate tapestry of sound which Bach could design with such marvellous ease.

Half-way through the composition I missed a note in one of the inner voices, and, thrown off my balance at once, I was brought to a dead stop.

'Bravo,' cried my companion. 'I acknowledge your talent.'

When I said I was practising Chopin's 'Revolutionary' Étude to develop my left hand, the fair-haired pianist played Chopin's E minor Prelude, which makes such demands on the left hand, with virtuosity. 'That is a more useful study than the "Revolutionary",' he said. 'I would practise that one instead if I were you.'

'By jove,' I said admiringly. 'You have improved since I heard you last.'

'Not really,' he replied, flushing with pleasure. 'I am only in better form. That is the trouble with young pianists like ourselves . . . We can't always do justice to ourselves . . . We

are too erratic . . . Occasionally we play well; more often we play badly. But the "topnotchers" play well all the time. They have such "control", that even when they are off form, they play well enough to deceive all but the critics.'

My new friend raved about modern composers I had never even heard of, and demonstrated the new scales and harmonic schemes they built their works on, until I was completely bewildered. What a black night of ignorance I groped about in? How was I, while endeavouring to stave off actual starvation, to acquire all that this cultured fellow had at his finger-tips?

§ VIII

The Bradford family was seated down by the fire in the parlour. The girls loved sitting in the firelight, watching the flames lick round glowing logs. It was the first house with fireplaces they had ever lived in.

Full of my visit to the Y.M.C.A., I told them about the young pianist and his promise of the finest dinner in Winnipeg on the day I played the first of the 'Forty-eight' from memory.

'Who did you say this fellow was?' asked Mr. Bradford, in the slow ponderous tone he used when quizzing me. After some inarticulate growls and disparaging remarks, he said sarcastically, 'He didn't say he would get you a job, did he?'

I trembled with suppressed rage.

In the privacy of my bedroom I reviewed my position. Those words about 'getting a job' had revealed Mr. Bradford's attitude towards my music.

'He thinks music is only something to carry me over a tough period till I get a job,' I soliloquized. 'So, instead of spending most of my waking hours practising, I am expected to look for work.' I nodded at my reflection in the dressing-table mirror as I removed my collar and tie. 'So the cause of his grumpiness is that I haven't been raking the streets all day looking for work that's only fit for Bohunks. Well, Mr. Bloody Bradford,' I muttered to the door, 'you can go to blazes! I'm going to practise the piano until you kick me into the street.'

Thus determining on my line of action I tumbled into bed. Only in sleep could one forget the continual warfare waged by the world against one's noblest aspirations!

§ 1 X

'Come right in, Mr. Walker,' cried Jack Grahame's mother, when I called to give her daughters their first lesson. 'I'm right pleased to meet ye. I've heard a' about ye frae oor Jack and his girl.'

The white-haired motherly soul showed me into a bright sitting-room furnished in a simple modern style, saying as we went, 'So ye've come a' the way frae Scotland like so mony o' the rest o' us. It's a hard country this, at first, but never mind, once ye've settled doon an' had a guid look round ye'll get on fine. The girls are juist in frae schule, so while ye're giein' them their lesson, I'll mak' ye a wee cup o' tea.'

'Please don't trouble yourself on my account,' I begged, tears in my eyes at the memories evoked by her warm welcome.

'It's nae trouble,' declared Mrs. Grahame. 'I wouldnae like to think o' my Jack meetin' a Scotchwoman in a strange land an' no bein' offered a cup o' tea in her ain hoose.'

A girl with a sweet face and quiet voice and manner entered the room. 'This is Margaret. Noo, see ye mind a' that Mr. Walker tells ye,' said Mrs. Grahame as she left us.

My latest pupil had been working at 'Hemy's Tutor' and was still in the most elementary stages. Unlike the two passionate Polish girls, she listened in a quiet docile way to my criticisms of her five-finger exercises and little tunes, and my suggestions on the best way to practise.

I shook my head when I saw her five-year old sister.

'Ye can gie her a lesson onyway,' said Mrs. Grahame, 'and if ye cannae mak' onythin' o' her we can wait till she's a bit older.'

How ignorant I was of the art of teaching I realized more than ever as I struggled to interest the child in a simple five-finger exercise. After the countless hours I had spent at the

piano since my fifteenth year, it was mortifying to discover how difficult it was to impart to others that little knowledge I had gained.

'Weel, and whit dae I owe ye, Mr. Walker?' asked Mrs. Grahame, purse in hand. 'Noo, come away intae the kitchen. I've got a cup o' tea ready,' she said, when our business had been transacted.

The shining kitchen — the table set with tea things and heaped plates of home-baked scones and pancakes, fresh butter and home-made jam — transported me back to Scotland.

'And what part o' Scotland dae ye came frae?' asked Mrs. Grahame, unable to conceal her eagerness to hear news from home as she poured out the tea.

'Ayrshire,' I answered.

'Ayrshire,' she breathed, a far-away expression on her face as she looked out of the window. 'Aye, I ken Ayrshire weel,' she sighed. 'We come frae Thorneliebank, just oot o' Glasgow,' she began, after a pause. 'Jack's father worked in the dyeworks. Maybe ye've been in Thorneliebank?'

I spoke of the innumerable times I had passed through Thorneliebank on my way to Rouken Glen, and of the horde of friends and relatives I possessed in all parts of Glasgow.

'We came oot here before the War, when things were slack at the dyeworks,' went on Mrs. Grahame. 'I can tell ye we had a sair time o' it for the first two or three years. I'll never forget that first winter, when a' we had was an auld shanty above oor heids and no' mony blankets on the beds and twa bairns tae feed. Jack's faither had tae go oot tae the Bush. When the cauld came I thocht I would never live through the winter. We hadnae much money tae buy wood for the stove, and Jack was only a wee laddie, no' able tae help much. But we wauchled through, and after a bit, when Jack's faither got constant work at his ain trade, we wouldnae hae gone back tae Thorneliebank for onything. Here we are . . . in oor ain hoose . . . nae landlords tae worry aboot . . . and a bit laid bye in the bank for a rainy day — that's mair than we could ever manage at hame. And there's a chance for

the young folks oot here. There's Jack, oot travellin' noo and gettin' weel payed for it, though I lie at nights whiles, thinkin' o' him awa' oot in they Prairie toons, sleepin' maybe between damp sheets, and no' gettin' the feedin' he's used tae at hame . . . It's no' as if oor Jack was a fine strong lookin' laddie like yersel'. Jack was aye a delicate bairn and needed his mither bye a' the time.'

And so an hour and more passed.

§ x

On Saturday I handed eight dollars to Mrs. Bradford, who returned a dollar as pocket-money.

'Well, are you still satisfied with our arrangement?' asked Mr. Bradford. In a good humour, he leaned back in his chair and proceeded to give me some fatherly advice.

'Now, I've been keeping my eye on you this week,' he began. 'I've no fault to find in your behaviour towards the girls, and I've never heard you utter a word that anybody could take exception to . . . But! . . . You're too slow in everything you do . . . Canada's not a country a man can afford to dream in . . . You've got to take your coat off and roll up your sleeves and "work" when you come to Canada. There's no room for slackers out here. If you had had to go through what I had to when I first came out here, you'd know all about it . . . You young fellows have no idea what life is like . . . Everything's made too easy for you. Now, I've no intention of making things easy for you, and don't think it . . . It isn't good for a young fellow to have things made soft for him. What I want to see you doing is getting a move on . . . Getting up early in the morning and going out to look for a job instead of moseying about the house sitting at the piano . . . nothing'll come to you sitting there all day . . . an hour or two at night's surely enough time to waste at the piano. And I want you to help about the house, there's dozens of ways you could make yourself useful to my wife.

'Now, I'm telling you all this for your own good,' he said,

after carrying on in this strain for a time. 'I'm just speaking to you as I would speak to one of my own boys; I want you to look on yourself as one of the family.'

Having endured it all patiently, I nodded and said I would think over his words. I marvelled at the vast mental gulf between us.

It was only a matter of days till I found myself back in the streets again!

§ x i

There was a babble of female voices and a general carrying of chairs and cushions out to the veranda, when a party of Norah and Lilian's girl friends arrived after lunch. 'Crikey!' cried Paul, 'With all these hens cacklin', a guy can't hear himself think. I'm beatin' it outta here.'

Calling his little brother to come and 'pitch' he went out to the backyard with a baseball bat.

Lilian seized me and introduced me to the group of fine, healthy, bright-eyed girls in light summery frocks, who chattered on the veranda. 'Now girls, Jimmy's mine, so none of you have to be running off with him,' she cried.

When I made my escape and walked towards the riverside, I was surprised at the silly thoughts the warm spring sunshine and the pretty girls I had just left put into my head. Girls! dances! cafés! cinemas! theatres! automobiles! — all part of the sacrifices I would have to make if I wanted to realize my ambitions!

But dreams of future fame were poor consolation for the overwhelming sense of loneliness which swept over me as I walked along, suffering all the mental agony of a young Romantic who finds himself mateless on a lovely spring afternoon.

A gang of convicts working on the roadway before the Parliament Buildings drew my attention. As I passed within a few feet of them, one man, in straightening his back, jerked his head forward in a peculiar way which was familiar.

The convict's eyes met mine as I half-stopped. It was Macneish of the Immigration Hall!

No! I reflected, as I hurried on. There are a lot of people a darned sight worse off than myself at the present moment!

§ X I I

'Say, Jimmy, you'd best look out,' cried Lilian, when I entered the dining-room at supper time.

'Look out . . . Why?' I asked blankly.

'Matilda's got her eye on you.'

'Who the deuce is Matilda?'

'Oh, Jimmy! How can you say that when you were introduced to her before you ran away this afternoon?'

'I don't remember any Matildas,' I protested, aware that I was in for a spell of unmerciful leg-pulling.

'Oh, Jimmy, Matilda will be hurt when she hears that,' said Lilian. 'Mother,' she cried, as Mrs. Bradford entered the room. 'What do you think Matilda said after we introduced Jimmy to her?' Rolling her eyes ecstatically and holding up her hands, Lilian mimicked Matilda's 'Gee, girls, but that's a swell-lookin' guy you got stayin' with you.'

There was a howl of laughter as I blushed furiously.

'She's a dandy cook, Jimmy,' coo'ed Norah.

'Golly, boy, you'll have some job gettin' her on your knee,' crowed Paul. 'She's that fat . . . say!' He whistled expressively.

'Don't be rude, Paul,' said his mother.

'Well, she is fat, ain't she?' wailed Paul. 'I wasn't being rude, I was only being truthful.'

'Oh, hark at little Georgie Washington,' snorted Lilian sarcastically.

'Now then, you two,' warned Mr. Bradford. 'We don't want any fighting. Your mother needs some peace. There's hardly a meal but the pair of you are squabbling.'

And so, like thousands of other suppers in Winnipeg at that hour, the meal went on.

§ XIII

I went out after supper. If I could no longer afford a vaudeville or cinema, I could at least watch the pleasure-hungry crowds streaming up and down Portage Avenue!

For a time I wandered up and down Portage Avenue, studying the faces of the passers-by and staring at the great lighted windows of Eaton's Store. Then, feeling lonely, I decided to call on Mrs. Black.

'Come right in, boy,' she cried, when she opened the door to me. 'Billie's here an' feelin' blue, so you'd better cheer 'er up.'

I recognized in the small tired-looking figure seated on the couch in the living-room the telephone girl who had sung at Mrs. Black's party.

'I feel tired and fed-up with everything,' she smiled wanly, when I asked how she fared.

'What's the trouble?' I asked.

'Oh, I don't know. It's a rotten life altogether. I sometimes wonder if it's worth going on with.'

'Don't take it seriously . . . laugh at it,' I cried.

'Oh, it's all right for you. You can go here, there, and everywhere . . . A man can do just as he pleases in this world . . . It's different for a woman. Life isn't fair to women . . . Oh, I guess I'll be all right to-morrow.'

Old Mrs. Black smiled, showing her toothless gums, and nodded her grey head approvingly when I talked of my pupils.

'Gee, Walker, yer'll be takin' that trip home in the *Berengaria* yet,' she cried.

'I don't see much of them now,' she grimaced, when I inquired after the Immigration Hall boys. 'I've still got Hareshaw an' his "lady barber" livin' here. Yer'll 've heard about the great man Red was stayin' with,' she sneered.

'No,' I said, remembering the fat bookie I had seen with Red.

'Red's back in the Immigration Hall. His "great friend" was pinched by the cops the other day. 'E's waitin' his trial

now for desertin' his wife an' skedaddlin' with five hundred pounds that wasn't his own.'

'And what about Harry?'

'Oh him, peugh! 'E ain't up to no good 'anging around Mrs. Berg when 'er husband ain't there . . . An' that young jailbird brother o' hers spendin' most of his time with Mrs. Slowacki while 'er pore little devil of a husband's slavin' out in the Bush for 'er. Some women need their behinds well kicked.'

Mrs. Black gave us her opinion of the world in general as she put on the kettle.

The Mackellars lived in a frame house opposite a wood-yard near the C.P.R. freight-yards. As I escorted Billie to her lodgings, she talked of when she lived in Chicago with her parents, now dead, and of the man she was engaged to, who had gone to the States, and never written for a year. She was absolutely alone in the world, and the coming of the automatic telephone had terrorized her.

When we stopped at the rickety garden gate, Billie said, in a hesitating way, 'To-morrow night I'm going to see the baby of one of the telephone girls who got married last year . . . Would you like to come? . . . They've got a piano and a gramophone with lots of good records.'

Jumping at the prospect of a musical evening, I arranged to call for her the following night and hurried back to the Bradfords.

§ XIV

From the conversation at breakfast next morning I gathered that Lilian was being 'confirmed' in the near future.

'Have you been confirmed?' Mr. Bradford asked me.

'What do you mean by being "confirmed"?' I asked.

'You don't know what being "confirmed" means?' he exclaimed incredulously. 'What sort of home were you brought up in, that you are ignorant of the most important thing in the world to every true Christian?'

'You forget I am a Scot and a Presbyterian,' I snapped, lashed into a rage by his stinging words.

'Well, are you a member of your own church?' he queried, regaining the wind I had taken out of his sails.

'No, I'm not,' I replied shortly.

'Then, why not come along with us to church this morning,' he began in a proselytizing tone. 'You would meet lots of nice people there who might be of service in getting you a job. And the music in the Episcopal Church is beautiful . . . we have a fine choir and a wonderful organist. Why don't you come and be confirmed with Lilian?'

The stormy past of Scotland in its struggles for religious freedom swept up from the recesses of my memory. This was how trouble arose in this world! Why hadn't Bradford the good taste to leave me in peace?

Leaving Norah and the mother to prepare the dinner, the entire family trailed off to church, while I walked alone in the sunshine, exploring the streets around the University and the Law Courts, and brooding on my position.

§ x v

That evening, Mrs. Mackellar, a disillusioned, cynical looking woman, showed me into her parlour.

'What are you playing?' I asked Billie, who sat at the piano.

'I was trying to figure out this accompaniment,' she said. Removing a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles from her eyes, she passed a hand over them and added, 'But my eyes are so weak I can hardly read the print . . . I'm scared I'll go blind.'

'Come on, let me hear you sing this song,' I said. Billie's words were a painful reminder that a famous eye-specialist had advised me not to enter any walk of life which would entail much eye-strain.

Billie's small, but clear and sweet soprano, brought Tom and Jessie into the room with their mother.

'An' whit pairt o' Scotland dae you come frae?' asked Mrs. Mackellar when the song was ended. 'Aye, you young lads are a great lot. Whit did ye come oot tae Canada for? Tae mak' yer fortune? Or run awa' frae some lassie that ye'd gotten intae trouble? . . . Ye had better watch him, Billie. They Scotch fellows are a' the same . . . A' tarred wi' the wan brush. Hae ye got a job?' she asked derisively.

Highly incensed, I shook my head.

'Whit! . . . Will nobody gie ye a job?' she cried ironically. 'Aye, ye're a great lot, you young yins . . . Come oot here, expectin' everybody's gaun tae run after ye, offering ye big money for daein' whit ye did in the Auld Country, an' that's naethin'.'

Getting her hat and coat, Billie rescued me from her landlady's biting tongue. 'It's only her way,' she said, as we walked towards Louise Bridge and St. Boniface. 'You mustn't take any notice of what Mrs. Mackellar says. She's had a hard life and has learned to look on every stranger she meets as being rotten and crooked. She's good at heart. She's been good to me when I've been sick and got behind with my rent.'

Billie's friends were a happy young couple. While she gossiped about the telephone girls with the wife, I carried on a conversation with the big laughing husband, who paced the living-room floor with his month-old son in his arms.

On the brand-new gramophone we had Gilbert and Sullivan, and Caruso singing 'On with the Motley', complete with sob at the end. Then, after I played on the piano, the carpet was lifted and we danced to records of 'It ain't gonna rain no mo', and 'Barney Google'.

Before leaving Billie at her lodgings I had arranged to go dancing with her and the two Mackellars at River Park on the following Wednesday.

§ x v i

Despite Mr. Bradford's words about 'getting a move on and looking for a job', I spent Monday morning at the piano.

There was an enormous difference in the flexibility of my fingers since I had started practising at the Bradfords. Playing scales and arpeggios at high speed was exhilarating.

Mr. Bradford had news for me at mid-day. 'A fellow I was talking to this morning said he had a job for you if you cared to take it,' he said.

'A job! What kind of job?' I asked, my heart sinking at the thought of the havoc manual labour would make of my hands.

'Winding armatures for automobiles.'

'And what about winter time?' I asked.

'Oh, well, he shuts down the workshop in winter as there's nothing doing in that line then.'

'Oh, I see!' I said, determined there and then to have nothing to do with winding armatures. Seven dollars a week, plus what I made teaching music, would mean being hopelessly in debt before the winter began!

I said evasively that I would like to think it over, and told him at supper time that, as there would be no chance of saving money for the winter, I had decided to have nothing to do with his friend's job. Mr. Bradford looked disappointed but said little, and the subject was dropped.

§ x v i i

'A fellow in the office said he was looking for a music-teacher for one of his kids,' said Mr. Bradford next day. 'He wants you to go round to his place whenever you are free.'

'I'll go this afternoon,' I said eagerly.

My landlord's demeanour grew cooler every day! How many more days would I spend under his roof?

'Come after supper, when ma man's back frae his work,' shrilled a female voice when I 'phoned the address.

In the afternoon I sought out the new premises of the Army and Navy Club near Notre Dame Avenue.

The common-room was crowded with members sitting at little round tables, talking over their beer about this and that, and always harking back to the titanic struggles of the late war. The talk I had with the unemployed clarinettist and one or two others unsettled me. When I walked back to the Bradfords I found myself visualizing vast empty plains, virgin forests, and great glacier-clad mountains, and I longed to be away from civilization with its perplexing social problems.

'How did you come to meet all those fellows?' queried Mr. Bradford, when I talked of the Club during supper.

The sneering tone angered me. Yes, like others, he was reluctant to discuss the Great War, because he had skulked at home while the men he sneered at now were making his job safe for him! 'I met them,' I replied coldly, 'when everybody else had turned their backs on me, and when I most needed friends.'

'They're not men for a young fellow to be going about with,' declared Mr. Bradford, in his most domineering tone. 'What have you done about looking for a job?'

'I've been too busy looking after my music to waste time running about Winnipeg on wild goose chases.'

It was in a black mood that I set out for the western suburbs that evening.

§ XVIII

A harassed looking woman ushered me into a small untastefully furnished parlour. Her husband was excessively hail-fellow-well-met.

'So you're the young fellow Bradford was spekin' about,' he began, eyeing me up and down cannily. 'Well, an' how d'ye like Canada? ... How long've you been teachin' music?'

'Oh, about a year,' I replied awkwardly.

'Got your degree?' he asked suspiciously.

'Well, n-no,' I hesitated, inwardly cursing the examination fetish.

'Oh,' said my fellow-countryman. He eyed me silently before continuing. 'My oldest girl's playin' in a movie, but she'll no' be bothered teachin' her wee sister. She gets good money. You want tae get intae the movies . . . that's where ye mak' the dollars. Gee! a cousin o' mine came oot frae Glasca last year. Boy, he was some pianist . . . Play jazz! . . . ye never heard onythin' like it. Oh, he had his degree all right. He got a job right here in Winnipeg at forty-five bucks a week, playin' in a movie . . . And was he pleased wi' that? . . . No' him. "I want ninety dollars a week," he says, an' clears oot tae the States . . . An' he got it tae. Ah, he was too good a man for Winnipeg. Nothin' could stop a man like thon frae pullin' in the dollars . . . A real crackajack pianist he was.'

The gusto all this was retailed with, and the way the speaker smacked his lips every time he pronounced the word 'dollar' disgusted me.

I was relieved when he called an eight-year-old girl into the room and said, 'Here she is. I'll leave ye tae see what ye can dae wi' her.'

Handing me my fee when the lesson was over, the child's father said significantly, 'We'll let ye know when tae call again.'

My mind was occupied with the gloomiest reflections during the first mile of the long walk back to the Bradfords. Gradually the bright sunshine chased away my forebodings. Why stay in Winnipeg when there was the whole of Western Canada to wander in? Was I not free as the wind, without a tie to bind me to any one place? To-morrow I would begin searching for a job that would take me as far from Winnipeg as possible! The man I had just left would tell Bradford that I was nothing but an impostor, and I would be heaved out into the street! I had started too late in life to be a concert-pianist, anyway — one had to study under great teachers for years amid congenial surroundings to achieve anything!

Ere I reached my lodgings, a load had been lifted from my shoulders. I had determined never to touch a piano again; to trample underfoot all I had dreamed of, worked, and even

suffered for, since I was a boy at school. Music had brought me nothing but unhappiness! The harder one slaved to perfect a technique which would enable one to express themselves through the medium of great music, the more people said, 'Yes, that's very pretty, but can't you play something we know?'

CHAPTER XIII

§ 1

LEAVING the noisy caboose I went out into the cool, sweet night air to watch the sunset. A solitary store faced the line of old box-cars I had left; farther off was a shanty with a wisp of smoke curling up from its stovepipe; near it stood a small shack. A belt of willows on the other side of the track screened a farmhouse with large red-roofed barns; the presence of more distant farms was marked by other clumps of willows against the sky.

'And this is Saskatchewan,' I breathed to myself, gazing over the westward rolling prairie and wondering anew at the colossal scale Canada was built on.

How swiftly events had moved during the last week! First I had met that Harvester in Main Street who, when I had asked after Sidney and Red, had replied, 'Aw' they're baith gaun oot West wi' that extra-gang the C.N.R. are signing on men for.' Then I had told Luke that I was desperate to get a job and clear out of the Bradfords'.

'It's all very well for that Bible-puncher to sit back an' say, "I don't thank you fer introducin' that young feller to me" . . . But what's he done for you himself, bar talk a lot of religious boloney?' Luke had declared heatedly. We had gone to a brewery which was reopening. There Luke had introduced me to a huge foreman who had said, 'Sure, I'll give the kid a job if he comes here at eight sharp on Monday morning.'

Meanwhile, Bradford had come home with a story about a fellow-worker who had been removed in a state of delirium tremens. 'The wife and child have had a terrible time,' he said. 'They've nowhere to go now, so I'm bringing them here till something can be done for them.'

On the Monday morning I had risen at seven and hurried to the brewery, where the foreman, who was watching a gang of labourers at work, had said, 'A job? . . . We got no jobs

around here, kid. Why, I got more men than I can use right now. I guess I'll have to be layin' some of them off.'

How sick and utterly dashed I had felt as I crawled back to the city, only to have Bradford say at lunch time, 'I'm sorry, but I must ask you to leave my house by the end of the week. I've had my eye on you since you came here, and this is the first morning you've got up early and gone out in search of work. I've got nothing against your character, but you're heart lazy . . . It's no wonder you haven't got on in Canada if you've done nothing but bum around the stove all day playin' the piano . . . It's your own fault, but I warned you, and now that this woman and boy are coming here I need your room.'

I had listened quietly, smiled, and said, 'All right, and thank you very much for all your kindness to me, Mr. Bradford.'

It was a pity the man had no sense of humour! I had put in more piano-practice under his roof than any other fortnight of my life!

Remembering the Harvester's words about the C.N.R. extra-gang, I had gone to the employment office only to be told that ex-service men were being given preference, and that there was only one more vacancy. Tearing back to the Army and Navy Club I had got the Colonel to 'phone up the office I had left and plead my cause, with the result that I got the job.

Next I found myself in a long passenger coach filled with men shouting, talking, laughing, and cursing, and again I had watched Winnipeg sink below the horizon! Pity that Sydney and Red had failed to appear with the gang! The prairie had stretched out from the railroad track to the horizon; for hours the coach had swayed gently, causing the men to nod their heads — the wheels beneath clicking rhythmically, and, as a grain elevator with a few unpainted shacks flitted past dream-like at long intervals, the engine had lifted up its voice in a long mournful wail! Night had fallen; dawn had found us crawling across Saskatchewan, sometimes brought to a standstill by cattle straying on the track. Low rounded knolls clothed with brushwood had given way to the 'Salt Plains'; then at last

streets of white, red-shingled bungalows, and crawling over a bridge across the muddy Saskatchewan River, the train had come to rest near the tall office-blocks and roaring street cars of Saskatoon's Main Street!

There had been a mid-day meal in a Chinese restaurant with five young Britishers, who had kept four pretty young Polish waitresses in a flustered giggling state by their vast winks and suggestive speech. Then we walked through the slumbering streets of Saskatoon, comparing notes and making ourselves known to one another. Hitched to a joggling freight we had journeyed still westward, and now, somewhere between Saskatoon and Battleford, I stood thinking of Winnipeg and my present surroundings!

The immensity of the prairie gripped me. It was vast, with the same terrible vastness of Beethoven's later music! It made life seem so pitifully short!

The sun burned up the west and left the cold ashes of night.

I returned to my caboose. Everybody was cursing because no blankets were being issued. When some filched straw from the neighbouring farm to spread on their bunks, Oregon, the American lumberjack in the opposite bunk, declared, 'I ain't havin' no straw in my bunk to git lousy,' I followed his example and lay on the bare planks with my clothes on, used my kitbag for a pillow, pulled my raincoat over me, and fell asleep.

§ 11

Stiff, cramped, and numbed with cold, I woke at dawn. Drawing my feet up under my raincoat I rubbed them till the circulation returned, then lay dozing till it was time to rise. A wash in icy water and a brisk rub down made me eager to begin the day's work.

At breakfast, the only change from Mactavish was in the faces ranged along either side of the heaped-up table running down the middle of the dining-car. Ginger, a red-headed nineteen-year-old Irish youth, sat on my left; on my right were two young South African brothers. Facing me was a man,

almost bald, with a clean-shaven weather-beaten face full of character — he had a deep vibrant voice and chose his words with care. He had already been nicknamed Yukon. On Yukon's left sat a skinny ragged fellow with the airs of a duke; on his right was Durham, a young Englishman with a frank jolly face. There was also at my end of the table a slim handsome Scot we called Dunoon, and a dusky half-breed Indian youth who seldom spoke.

In contrast to the Bohunks' animal-like preoccupation with their food, we kept up a lively conversation all through the meal. The rest of the gang ate in the other dining-car.

'Come on, put a jump in it, you sons a' bitches,' rasped the lean hawk-beaked Welsh boss, to the Bohunks with the jacks for raising the track, when we filed out of the cars after the meal. In ten minutes the ninety-odd men comprising the gang were hard at work, 'tamping' and jacking up the track.

Beside me worked Ginger, Nosey Parker — a tall thin Englishman with a yelping querulous voice and a hundred-percent American nasal accent, Oregon, and four other Britishers. I concentrated on conserving energy, having profited by my experience at Mactavish. The day passed in a world of clinking shovels, blinding sunlight, and good-humoured chaff.

Surprised to find myself only pleasantly tired after ten hours' unceasing labour, I left the dim crowded caboose after supper. Peeping through a window of the shack near the store, I saw an American organ, a raised platform, a reading-desk, and a number of long forms. 'Looks like a schoolroom,' I muttered. Trying the door and finding it unlocked, I went inside.

My vows to turn my back on music forgotten, I sat down eagerly at the organ. Over everything hung the profound brooding silence of the prairie; through the window I saw the sun setting vague masses of towering cumuli on fire as it sank.

Seeking vague dissonant harmonies, to accord with the strange yearning which surged up from the depths of my subconsciousness, my fingers moved instinctively among the keys in an improvisation.

It was dark when I crept into my bunk, the creases smoothed from my troubled spirit.

§ 111

'Who was playin' the organ last night?' the men asked one another next day. When I went back to the shack after supper, Durham, Pat, Dunoon, the South Africans, and two young Danes, followed me.

Fearing their derision, I was reluctant to play.

'Come on, play to us,' beseeched Durham. 'Anything you like . . . We'll appreciate it, even if we don't understand your kind of music.'

Beginning in G minor, I improvised in a brooding stormy way, making extensive use of fast running scale passages and rumbling tremolo bass notes, ending serenely in the tonic major.

'Now play us something we can sing to . . . something we all know,' cried Durham, when I stopped.

When I confessed my inability to play from ear, one of the South Africans picked up a hymn book and said, 'Here's music to play from.'

'Would you like me to play a hymn?' I asked in surprise.

'Sure, anything at all we can sing to,' they chorused.

Seven lusty young voices filled the shack while I played half a dozen hymns. Then they sang unaccompanied from a vast repertoire of camp-fire songs.

The last of the daylight had gone when we broke up our 'glee party', as Durham called it. Durham talked to me of his 'choir-boy' days in England on the way back to the gang.

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§ 115

'Hullo, Professor,' cried Iowa, a stout merry hobo, 'and how are we this morning?' And so I learned that Saturday morning that I was already known as 'the Professor'.

The stories I heard the men tell one another about my past amused me.

I was relieved when we sent the hand-cars careering supperwards that evening. Despite the way the Welshman drove us like machines I had kept on my feet, and now, with six dollars to my credit, I had a Sunday's rest before me!

For an hour after supper I rested. Oregon dozed in his bunk; the simple gentle-natured Slavs, who had the four bunks below us, talked in subdued voices. At the other end of the caboose, a small thick-set Scot reclined on a bottom bunk and told Dunoon, a scraggy Dubliner, the half-breed Indian, and a crippled Dane called Larry, what he 'wid dae wi' the bloody capitalists if he got a chance wi' a machine-gun'.

Now and then their voices rose in a wave of sound which broke into a burst of laughter.

When I made for the shack, it struck me that the pure air, and the vastness and silence of the prairie, had quietened the mental turmoil of the past weeks. Winnipeg had been a nightmare! I had wakened at last, to find the world a sweet, clean place, swept by healthy winds!

While at the organ, striving to recall Liszt's 'Liebestraum', a little girl tapped on the window.

'I was sent to ask you in to supper,' she said in a scared voice, when I went to the door. She looked up at me with all the shyness of a wild thing in her eyes. When I smilingly accepted the invitation she flew back to the near-by shanty.

A small, grey, untidy man, with the softest voice and the gentlest blue eyes I had ever seen, came out to meet me.

'Come right in, stranger, ye're welcome,' he said. 'My wife and I have been listenin' to ye playin' the organ, an' we thought ye might like a cup of tea an' a bite to eat.'

The wistful look in his eyes hurt me. There were lonely prairie winters and years of solitary living in his voice. His wife was a female counterpart of himself.

In their living-room there was barely room to pass between the table, which was hard against one wall, and the piano which was hard against the other.

'Would I play on their piano?'

I played Grieg's 'Morning'. Handing me a song called

'Star of the East', which was 'the most beautiful piece of music ever written', they begged me to play it.

They drew their chairs up, one at either elbow, and, though it was the most utter musical trash, tears streamed down their cheeks as I played.

The child, they whispered, was an adopted orphan.

'She is such a good quiet little thing,' said the wife. 'We are giving her music lessons with a teacher in the next town . . . she does try hard.' She talked of the musical problems the child was left to solve for herself.

'From their fine houses and barns, the farmers around here must be wealthy,' I said to the husband, when the wife began busying herself with tea-things.

'Yes, stranger, there are some wealthy farmers hereabouts. They are not afraid to pay a man for his work either.'

'Do you work land of your own?' I asked the eager speaker.

'No . . . I tried running a quarter-section for myself many years ago, but I found it better to hire myself out to a master for wages. I get all the work I need. Some years I get as much as seven dollars a day at harvest time . . . When a master pays you all that money you have to give him a good day's work in return, though . . . You have to work hard for so much money.'

I sat in the lamplight drinking tea with the old couple. Through the open door, the willow-encircled farms were silhouetted against the swiftly-fading afterglow of the sun.

A new confidence in the future took root as I sat there.

The couple beside me had found a solution to the problem of modern life by turning their backs on towns and cities and being content with little! They threw light on my own problem which suddenly narrowed down to two questions. Did I want to lose my individuality in the human maelstrom of some great city? Or did I want to preserve my identity in some lonely wind-swept region?

I rose at last, and, after thanking my host and hostess, departed.

'Good-luck, stranger . . . And may God bless ye,' their voices followed me.

Being Sunday, everyone was in high spirits at breakfast next morning.

'Whit about gaun tae Kirk?' cried Dunoon jocularly.

'Sure, I'll come with you,' laughed Durham.

'Will ye?' dared Dunoon.

'Sure I will . . . who else is coming?' Durham looked round at the rest of us.

The South Africans, Ginger, and myself, were roped in.

When in my caboose later, I joined the crowd gathered round the small aggrieved Scot. 'I came frae Ayr,' he told me. 'But I've been oot here in Canada for more'n ten years.'

Lying on his straw-covered bunk and picking his teeth with a matchstick, he told his story. He had been a farm-labourer and a year previously had lamed himself in falling from the roof of a barn. His grievance against society was that, after lying weeks in hospital he found that he was not entitled to compensation from his former employer. This fact, and partial dismemberment for life, had turned Scotty into an embittered Communist. 'Farmers!' he spat out, after a flow of vituperation. 'I wid like nothin' bettern tae have a' the farmers in Canada lined up before me wi' a machine-gun in ma' haun'.'

Dublin, the scraggy Irishman, told a war-time story of landing at Dublin docks on 'leave' from France. 'They hated us fightin' for the English,' he began. 'And here I was straight from the front-line trenches in all me lousy, muddy, clothes . . . me rifle over me shoulder like this. Bejabbers I wasn't two minutes off the ship when a stone whizzed past me head and a man came up and called me a bloody traitor.' With blazing eyes at the mere memory of the incident, Dublin stood up and swung the butt-end of an imaginary rifle. '"Call me a bloody traitor! Take that ye son-of-a-bitch," I cried as I cracked his head with the butt-end of me rifle. There were no more stones flung at me after that.'

A six-feet-four Englishman said that he had secured his job on the gang on the strength of the testimonials he had shown

an important C.N.R. official. The mental picture his words conjured up — of a tenderfoot seeking a job on an extra-gang with credentials from the parson and other 'respectable dignitaries' of a small English town, raised a howl of laughter.

'What the hell are you fellows laughin' at?' boomed the big man angrily. 'Do you want your damned jaws punched?'

He glared down from his top bunk on our upturned faces. When he relaxed and sank back with inarticulate mutterings we winked at one another. Six-feet-four was in the first throes of disillusionment, having been but a few days in the country.

'So ye've got back again,' cried Scotty, when we re-entered the caboose after attending the simple church service which had been held in the shack containing the organ. 'Christ! this is the first gang I've been on where the men went tae Kirk on Sunday. Goad! ye'll a' be buyin' bowler hats and kid gloves off yer first pey.'

§ V I

Working westward, by the middle of the next week we reached the first of the waves that the prairie sends rolling from the 'Great Lone Land' to the foothills of the Rockies. Gazing through the railroad cutting at the land ahead for the first time, I saw a tiny farm-town a league further on; three grain elevators stood against the skyline — on the C.P.R. railroad a mile or so to the north were two more elevators. In the foreground were tracts of virgin hillocky prairie, dotted with reedy lochans haunted by wild-fowl.

Towards the end of the week our disreputable box-cars were hitched to a way-freight and the gang moved on to the little town ahead.

I set out to view the place on the evening of our arrival.

Facing the railroad and the three elevators was a garage and a few unpainted shacks. A single street consisting of three stores, a bank, a pool-room, and a scattering of frame houses ran at right angles to this.

Shirt-sleeved men, straw hats tilted back on their heads, and females in flimsy summer frocks, sat on veranda steps, eyeing the men sauntering up from the bunk-cars with frankly curious stares.

I followed Durham, Ginger, and the South Africans into the pool-room and watched them playing Boston Pool. Then, sickened by the stale tobacco-tainted atmosphere, I sought Main Street again. As I wandered aimlessly up the dusty roadway such an overwhelming longing to play on a piano again came over me, that I crossed to a group of villagers seated on the veranda steps of a store, and asked them if they knew of anyone who would be willing to let me play on their piano.

'Waal, stranger,' said one lean grey-headed man, thoughtfully rasping his stubbly chin with one hand. 'I'm sure I don't know. But I guess anybody around here would let ye play to them an' be glad of it.' 'Yep,' he said, after an enormously stout girl had whispered something, 'there's the parson goin' up the street. I guess he's just the man ye're lookin' fer.'

Catching up with a tall spare figure in a black felt hat, I repeated my request.

'Why, certainly,' cried the parson eagerly. 'I'm on my way home now . . . Come along, my dear fellow, my wife will be only too pleased to meet someone who can play and talk about music.'

§ V I I

Two hours later I was seated in a living-room, drinking tea with the parson and his wife, a fine courageous looking woman. The lamp was lit as it had grown dark while I had been playing on the upright piano.

Our talk was of concert-halls and opera-houses in the Old Country.

'Would you care to play a few solos at a concert we are giving on Saturday evening?' asked the parson suddenly.

'Well . . .' I faltered, my heart fluttering nervously at the

bare idea of playing in public, 'I have really nothing that I can play.'

'But,' chorused my host and hostess, 'you have only to play as you have played to us to-night. You have no idea what it would mean to the people here, who never have a chance of hearing good music, unless on a gramophone.'

They were delighted when I nodded my consent. A programme was drawn up there and then. The parson's wife was going to accompany the singers. She had a few piano pupils, who, she said, brought a little more grist to the mill.

Lying in my bunk that night, memories surged back of the frightful havoc nerves had made of my technique on my first public appearance as a solo-pianist, only a few months before emigrating. On that occasion I had sat at the instrument bathed in a cold clammy sweat, my face, I was told afterwards, as white as a sheet.

§ VIII

'We're a' comin' tae gie ye a clap, Professor,' cried Dunoon, during supper on the fateful night. 'The whole gang kens about this concert.'

I smiled wanly, feeling like a condemned man having a last meal before walking to the scaffold.

They gathered round me while I shaved, trimmed my little moustache, and brushed my hair. I scarcely recognized as my own the healthy sunburnt face which was reflected in Scotty's pocket mirror.

'Whit are ye gaun tae wear?' asked Scotty.

'I've only got the clothes I stand up in,' I answered ruefully, thinking of the dinner-jacket suit in the cabin-trunk left with the Bradfords.

They eyed me up and down in a doubtful silence.

'Sure, and he's fine like that,' cried Dublin.

'Here, let's polish up yer boots then, we cannae have ye disgracin' the gang,' said Dunoon; producing a rag he got down on his knees before me. 'By gee!' he panted, as he rubbed

vigorously, 'if ye let us doon, and don't bring the roof doon wi' yer playin' after me polishin' yer boots, I'll knock the heid aff ye when we get back.'

After much criticism they said I would do.

I was too excited to have more than a dim recollection of mounting a flight of flimsy steps in the dusk, shaking hands with the parson and several strangers, then entering a long brightly lit hall.

While the place filled, I sat with Durham and the others, keyed up to a frightful pitch. Behind me was our Welsh boss, the big timekeeper, and the small thick-set Russian who had charge of the 'jack-gang'. Scattered among the villagers and farmers were groups of our little Slavs and huge Austrians.

The parson prayed, and the concert began.

First, a tall thin man raised a laugh by singing lugubriously a funny song. Then a slip of a schoolgirl sang in a tiny wistful voice which made me think of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, cool dark woods, and the fairy tales of my childhood.

I heard, as in a dream, the parson talking about me. With a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach and amid the handclaps of the villagers and farm-folk and the encouraging shouts of my friends, I made for the upright piano on the platform. Clad in my worn breeches, open-necked shirt, old tweed jacket, and great topboots, I bowed and sat down at the instrument.

Grasping the sides of my chair and bending my head forward I waited for absolute stillness. All the wild confusion within me died down. No one here knew me! What did it matter? . . . I would never see them again.'

In a tiny whisper, I began playing Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata', and, losing myself in the music, played as if alone in my own home in Scotland.

The enthusiasm of the audience astounded me. As an encore I played Grieg's 'Morning', and, as they clamoured for more, Chopin's 'C Minor Prelude'. Then, my head soaring in the clouds, I left the platform.

When I resumed my seat a young Englishman slipped up beside me and talked in whispers during the items which

followed. He worked on the local section-gang and had found the ability to play the piano a great help in Canada. 'You get invited all over the country,' he said. 'I'm out playing in some house or other every night in the week. It's not like in the Old Country, where nobody takes any notice of you . . . But you've got a lot of jealousy to contend with. Because I'm not a member of their union, some of the section-hands have tried to get me the sack. That's the worst of these small towns; there's always somebody nosing about trying to keep a fellow from getting on . . . Can you play Rachmaninoff's "Prelude"? ' he asked, as I rose to play again.

This time, when I stared at the keyboard awaiting silence, I felt absolutely detached from my surroundings. Beginning with fluid fragments of scale passages in the right hand, and simple tonic and dominant broken-chord passages in the left, I began improvising a rhapsody in my favourite key of G minor. Sensing that my audience was with me, I worked down towards the bottom of the keyboard, introduced a new theme with great solemnity, then worked into a perfect tempest of martello double-octave passages, interspersed with chromatic scales in the bass, tremolos and trills in the treble, and handfuls of chords and arpeggios rushing up and down. I cast all restraint aside and created the most infernal uproar imaginable. My long hair fell over my eyes causing me to toss my head back time after time. Finally, having exhausted my technical resources, I concluded the improvisation with the tiniest pianissimo I could draw from the instrument.

The audience, evidently staggered by the chaos of sound I had created, broke out into a pandemonium of applause. I played the Chopin 'A major Polonaise', and still they clamoured. Liszt's 'Liebestraume' followed with improvised cadenzas. Knowing the liberties I was taking with the music I played, I was amazed at the insatiability of my audience. They refused to let me leave the platform.

Wondering what to play, I returned to the piano. Remembering the Godowsky record of the 'Fire-music' from *Die Walkure* I had listened to so often when living with the Reimers, I was reminded in turn of whole days spent playing

the score of that opera at home. Without a moment's hesitation I plunged into the 'Ride of the Valkyrie', determined to improvise a fantasia from Wagner's famous opera. No one will know what I'm trying to play anyway, I assured myself, as I pounded at the theme in the bass and played chains of trills in the treble. All I knew of Wagner flooded back as I progressed. I was no longer in Saskatchewan, but back in the Theatre Royal in Glasgow listening to the Beecham Opera Company.

Working towards the 'Fire-music' I brought in the Siegfried 'motif' at last, and so brought my fantasia to a tumultuous conclusion.

Bathed in perspiration, wrought up to an extraordinary degree, and exulting at the conquest I had made of my fear of playing in public, I left the platform for the last time.

Dozens of people pressed forward to shake me by the hand, making no attempt to conceal their emotion. It was all damned queer and bewildering! People in Scotland didn't crowd round one with tears streaming down their cheeks to offer thanks for a few piano solos!

§ 1 x

Next day I was made acutely conscious of the fact that I was the chief topic of conversation with the entire gang, by the heads bent together with eyes fixed on me, and the sudden silence that fell when I approached a group of men.

While resting in my bunk-car after our Sunday breakfast, I was amused to hear Scotty say in a lowered voice: 'Hae ye no' seen the Professor's name plastered a' ower the place in Winnipeg? . . . He's one o' they eccentric guys that likes tae get away frae the city on a gang like this just for the experience o' seein' how fellows like us live. I bet he's got a wad o' dough safe away in the bank. Did ye never see his card up on the board in the Carnegie Library?'

As Scotty's voice died to a whisper, I wondered what legends were being woven round my name.

'They Bohunks think you're Jesus Christ come back tae earth,' he told me later. 'I've been watchin' the way they sit whisperin' and lookin' at ye whenever ye're aboot. They think onybody that can play that high-falutin' highbrow stuff is awa' above a' other men.'

Before supper, my name was bawled all down the train. Looking out, I saw that a saloon car had driven up. 'Hey Professor!' shouted the Welshman, 'Here's a gentleman wantin' to speak to you.' As I passed our boss he muttered: 'God damn it! . . . I've never seen a gang like this before . . . The world's goin' crazy!'

'Good evening, Mr. Walker,' said a tall slim well-dressed man, in a pleasant cultured voice. 'My wife and I wondered if you would care to come to dinner.'

Shaking the proffered hand, I grimaced at my working clothes.

'Oh, we quite understand,' he smiled. 'There will be only ourselves, so you needn't worry about clothes.'

I thanked him and accepted the invitation.

'I'll return for you in half an hour,' he cried brightly as he drove off.

'What did he want, Professor?' a score of eager voices asked.

'Gee, Professor, ye'll be gettin' too big for the likes o' us,' exclaimed Dunoon when I told them.

'Say, boy,' said Scotty, 'Ye'll be landin' somethin' big yet. Ye've got a' the folks in that burg eatin' oot yer hand now.'

'Come on, Professor,' cried Dunoon. 'We'll hae tae smarten ye up . . . We cannae hae ye disgracin' the gang. Here, try on this jacket o' mine an' see if it'll fit ye.' He produced a blue serge jacket which fitted me perfectly across the shoulders but was a trifle long in the sleeves.

Smoking pipes and hand-made cigarettes, the others criticized while my self-appointed valet turned me round and round for inspection. They were as excited as schoolboys. Never, they declared, had they been on a gang where autos called to take men away to dinners.

'Bring me back a leg o' chicken,' called Dublin.

'A big fat cigar for me,' cried Scotty.

'See an' enjoy yersel,' shouted Dunoon.

A chorus of good wishes followed me from the merry sunburnt heads leaning out of the other bunk-cars.

§ x

Most of the settlers in this district were English like himself, my host, a man in the early thirties, told me.

He stopped his car before one of the few modern bungalows which stood aloof — an embryo 'west-end' — from the rest of the village.

His wife, pale, fair, slim, and attractive, met us in the hall, wearing a green evening dress of a clinging silky material. In my clumsy topboots, old breeches, and borrowed jacket, I felt utterly out of the picture when I stepped into the drawing-room with its rose-coloured lamp shades, polished rug-strewn floor, and shiny modern furniture.

Supper was served in the daintiest possible manner; everything about me bore the imprint of my hostess's social aspirations and pride in the management of domestic affairs. After the rough-and-ready life of the extra-gang, I felt in these surroundings like an uncouth barbarian.

To set me at my ease, my host talked of his experiences on gangs during the construction of the motor road through the Rockies. Once started, the conversation flowed smoothly from one thing to another.

'But why are you living among all those horrible men, and doing such dangerous work?' shuddered my hostess. 'With your genius, you ought not to be running risks of injuring your hands.'

'Oh, it's a fine experience,' I laughed carelessly, determined to act up to Scotty's theory of my being an eccentric intellectual.

'Yes,' said my host seriously. 'You really oughtn't to be doing rough work with your hands. With your musical gifts,

you owe a duty to society . . . Just think! if you got a finger smashed!’

‘Wouldn’t you like to . . . But no, this is far too small a place for you to settle down and teach in,’ said my hostess. ‘You would want a city big enough to offer scope for the talent you’ve got.’

The respect with which they regarded my musical attainments proved that the pianist in the Y.M.C.A. in Winnipeg had spoken truthfully when he declared it was simple to bluff people in prairie towns.

‘But you heard all I can play from memory last night,’ I said, when they asked me to play.

‘Well, play them again,’ pleaded my host. ‘You have no idea how we enjoyed hearing you last night. Out here in the West we are absolutely buried. We’ll talk about you for months now.’

After I had played, I got them to talk about life in the village.

‘I’m sorry for the womenfolk in the hot months,’ said my host. ‘They feel the heat more than the men. There are days when they are too limp to do anything but sit in the shade. I even drive in my car to my store a hundred yards away because I haven’t the energy to walk that distance.’

Canada was a man’s country, he maintained, after talking of the various hardships the prairie imposed on women, chief of which was a gnawing cancer of loneliness.

§ x i

Next day, while trimming gravel apart from the main body of the gang, I sensed another presence. Raising my head from my task, I saw that the Welshman was standing over me, regarding me with suspicious eyes.

‘What’s the idea?’ he demanded harshly.

‘What idea?’ I asked in surprise.

‘What’s the idea?’ he reiterated.

‘What do you mean?’ I said in bewilderment.

'Workin' here on this gang. What have you been up to?'

'I'm working here because I'd starve if I didn't,' I replied passionately. 'I've got no money, and this is the only kind of work Canada has to offer me. Don't think I would be doing this if it wasn't absolutely necessary. I haven't robbed, raped, or murdered anybody, so you needn't be alarmed.'

'A fellow like you can make far more in a town teachin' kids music, than doin' this pick and shovel work,' began the Welshman, evidently convinced by my indignation that I was no runaway crook. 'Why, my kid at home there gits music-lessons from a guy at a dollar a time; you should be gettin' the same. Well, there's nothin' much I can do for you just now in the way of givin' you a softer job . . . I guess there's no soft jobs on this gang, but I'll see what can be done later . . . Headquarters are makin' me go hell-for-leather, an' I've got to drive everybody to keep my own job.'

It dawned on me that my lean dynamic boss was being sympathetic and helpful. 'Get on with the job,' he said brusquely, when I thanked him.

§ X I I

Six-feet-four was the first man to crack up under the strain of lifting a mile of track per day. He had been growing more and more irritable in the bunk-car at nights, telling Scotty and Co. to shut their 'blasted mouths' when they laughed and talked too loudly, and going into paroxysms of rage when they cursed him in their indignation.

One morning, while working mechanically under a blazing sun, we were startled by a beastlike snarl. In amazement, we saw Six-feet-four drop his shovel, and run, with bared teeth and hands opening and shutting convulsively, towards the Austrian straw-boss, whose sole duty was to stand behind the last 'tamping gang' and see that no one slacked. 'All he needs is a whip,' we used to say, when comparing him to a slave-driver.

'By God!' thundered Six-feet-four. 'I've stood enough of it.'

That's the third time you've picked on me this morning, you Austrian son-of-a-bitch . . . Christ! To think that I fought you bastards during the War only to have you bullying me on British soil . . . Come on, you —, put your hands up, I'm going to smash the bloody guts out of you, by God.'

There was something Homeric about the Englishman's rage.

Turning white, the Austrian staggered backwards, putting his hands before his face in alarm.

The older members of the gang cried warningly that the penalty for striking a man on the track was a long term of imprisonment.

Six-feet-four gnashed his teeth and howled in a transport of baffled rage. 'Come over the fence,' he roared, running to the side of the track and waving the Austrian after him. When the straw-boss stood terror-stricken, he hurled a torrent of invective at him and his whole race.

The horrors of the War and its bitter aftermath, coupled with the shattering of hopes held out by the Emigration agents in England had evidently slightly deranged Six-feet-four's mind.

The last we ever saw of him was his huge frame dwindling down the track towards the bunk-cars.

§ XIII

'Can you play cricket, Professor?' asked Durham, coming into my bunk-car one evening. 'Some of the men from the town have come to see if we can raise an eleven to play them to-night.'

Dunoon and I volunteered to join his team.

'No fear,' said the scraggy Englishman who had been nicknamed Lord Godalmighty. 'I'm having a rest after my day's labour. If I do my work I consider that sufficient exercise for one day.'

'Say,' snorted Oregon, 'You're crazy, goin' knockin' yourselves up runnin' after a fool ball like a lotta kids.'

'Come on, boys, an' we'll root for them,' cried Iowa, rustling up a crowd of supporters for us.

The village team included the doctor, the parson, the banker, the garage-owner, Mr. Caldbeck, the thin man who had sung the comic-songs at the concert, and the section-gang.

'We are having another concert in a fortnight's time,' said Mr. Caldbeck, drawing me aside during the game. 'We wondered if you would be good enough to play for us again. Lots of the farmers didn't know about you, and now they're 'phoning in from miles around, asking if it would be possible to get you to play again.'

'But the gang will be miles away by then,' I replied.

'Oh, but I would come for you in my car, even if it was a hundred miles,' Mr. Caldbeck hastened to explain. 'We would put you up for the week-end, and on the Sunday I could take you round and talk things over with you. You could settle down here if you wanted to,' he added seriously. 'You have made a very great impression on us. I assure you you would have no difficulty in getting as many pupils as you wanted.'

I laughed at the way fate played with me when I walked back to my bunk-car that night.

§ x i v

When we reached the cutting through the next westward wave of the prairie, I saw a ridge of hills blue with distance to the south-west; a town lay on the C.P.R. line to the north.

Our next stop was a wayside halt with a grain elevator and a few shacks. On the evening of our arrival the gang explored the town to the north *en masse*.

Flivvers rattled along the dusty Main Street with its uneven board-walks and electric standards, giving the place a bustling air. There was even a small cinema among the inevitable grain merchants and general stores.

'Say, Professor,' said Nosey Parker, while we 'tamped'

opposite one another next morning. 'The manager of the movie in that hick burg over there was lookin' for you last night. He says he wants to make a deal with you.'

'A deal with me!' I echoed.

'Sure, about punchin' the ivories in his movie show. He wants you to go and see him.'

As I slaved for my thirty cents an hour I viewed my situation from every possible angle.

If I left the gang, where, in spite of rough food and sleeping on bare planks without blankets, I felt fitter than ever before in my life, and accepted a job in that cinema, how long would I last in a town of a thousand inhabitants? It was impossible for me to play a complete change of programme twice a week! For the first week I would be the talk of the district . . . everybody would flock to hear me! They would begin to detect flaws during the second week, and break out into open criticism during the third! After that it would be only a matter of days till I was flung out of my job with nowhere to go! . . . This cursed jazz was the snag! Winnipeg had shown that I needed a year or two's hard study before I could set up as a teacher with a clear conscience.

I would stay with the gang till it was disbanded, then return to Scotland and see if there was any possibility of my studying for a year or two, and then I would return to this part of Saskatchewan!

§ x v

'You can do the chores for cook to-day,' the Welshman said, after a young Canadian who had assisted the cook had been sent home.

'He would do nothing at all,' the cook wailed, when I reported for duty in the stifling cook-car and asked why the lad had been discharged. 'He lay on the stove all day . . . I guess he was pinin' for his mammy in Saskatoon.'

Two young cultured-voiced, khaki-breeched Englishmen had lately joined the gang as cookees.

Keith was a tall fair-haired extravert, of lean and powerful build, with a rich baritone voice. Roy was small like myself, though of much lighter build. He had the sensitive features of a poet, with introspective eyes; a lock of brown hair fell over a broad forehead. Out of his element on the rough-and-tumble of Canadian life, Roy's tenor voice was apt to become tired and dispirited.

They insisted on calling me 'Johnnie'.

'This is a working man's country, Johnnie,' said Roy, as we dried an immense pile of plates and cutlery which Keith washed. 'It's no use for fellows like you and I. Workmen don't accept us as one of themselves. They resent a fellow coming in among them who has had a good education and has refined ideas. They hate you for what they have been denied themselves . . . I've had enough of this country. I'm trying to work my way home. I've been right across Canada now, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and I've seen all I want to see of it . . . Enough to convince me that I could never spend my life in this sordid way.'

They described their journey from Vancouver to Saskatoon, where they had secured their present jobs. 'We rode freight trains, chopped wood and did chores for meals at farms . . . slept in barns and any old place,' laughed Keith. He had been a lieutenant in France and proudly displayed an enormous abdominal scar caused by a German bayonet.

'I'll never forget that terrible night when we rode the "Transcontinental",' shuddered Roy. 'We climbed up on the tender of the engine, Johnnie, as it was pulling out of a station, and lay there all night. I was scared to death I would fall asleep and roll off on to the track.'

When the dishes had been cleared up after the mid-day meal and the tables set for supper, we lazed in the bunk-car set aside for the cook's staff. After my Spartan sleeping quarters, it seemed luxurious, with thick blankets on the four bunks, tables, chairs, and lockers for one's belongings, with plenty of light streaming through big curtained windows.

Keith talked of experiences as a salesman in Vancouver. 'I stole across the border and settled down in Seattle once,' he

said. 'But some dirty hound told the authorities that I had no business to be in the States. They clapped me into jail for a fortnight, then sent me back to Vancouver. I went into partnership with a fellow . . . He was really a common sort. I introduced him to some nice people, but they didn't like him and said I wasn't to bring him back to their houses. We shared a room until he told me he was a homosexualist. God! I was never so disgusted in my life . . . It's a hell of a country, this, you can't trust a soul.'

§ x v i

The local stationmaster's wife having sent word that she wanted to see me, I asked Roy to accompany me after supper.

'I hear you are a great pianist,' he said, as we set off.

Laughingly I shook my head. 'I wish I was. I play a lot, but I'm a long, long way from being a great pianist.'

'But didn't you play at some concert a little time ago? I hear them talking about it at meal times,' went on Roy, adding that he sang and played his own accompaniments.

The stationmaster's wife was a pious soul, dismayed at my living among ungodly men. She talked proudly of her son's music-lessons, after I had played. 'Yes, I've got a fine teacher,' the lad said enthusiastically.

'Oh, I hope you haven't been to that terrible town,' his mother cried, referring to the place to the north. 'Please don't ever go there. It is full of wicked, bad folk . . . God will punish them in his own good time! Why don't you come and live with us? A boy like you needs some one to look after him . . . We would make a home for you here.'

It wasn't the first time I had heard words like these!

Thanking her, I said that though I would not accept her offer of a home, I would say my prayers and read my Bible like a good Christian. This unblushing falsehood seemed to set her mind at ease.

'You simply must get away from this gang, Johnnie,' insisted Roy, when we returned to the bunk-cars. 'It's tragic,

an artist like you living a life like this. You'll ruin your hands with this labouring. You'll get stiffened up and never be able to play again.'

'Yes,' I replied quietly, 'that's what I'm afraid of. The other night I woke up with my fingers curved and rigid like iron bars with cramp . . . It scared me.'

It also reminded me of Ralph's jeering prophecy on the *Marburn*.

§ x v i i

Despite my mental conflict, as to whether art, or a nomadic existence as a casual labourer, was to be the path I chose in life, interest in my surroundings, and the gradual unfolding of the diverse characters around me, was continual.

Young, healthy, and overflowing with energy, I worked my ten hours a day under a blazing sun. For the most part I was happy, though, as the days grew hotter, I found myself grow nervy and irritable, subject to blind rages which I had difficulty in controlling.

Iowa, who knew the North American continent as only the hobo can know it, was the most fascinating talker on alkali-deserts, cotton fields, wheat fields, cities, mountain ranges, prairies, lumber-camps — Iowa had the gift of painting vivid verbal backgrounds to his experiences.

'I think I'll go tae Ontario when I'm finished here, boys,' cried Dunoon one day. 'That's the place! . . . nothin' but fruit . . . Jist lie aboot a' day an' pick some fruit when ye're hungry.'

'Gee! boy,' came Iowa's voice. 'Just you try it! Ho! ho! . . . I guess I thought the same once till I tried it . . . Lay under the trees for two or three days . . . Boy, but didn't I just think I was in the Garden of Eden . . . Pears, peaches, apples . . . Oh, I guessed it was heaven all right. Then, gee! didn't I just suffer for it! I thought I was goin' to die of dysentery before that fruit was through with me.'

One of Iowa's many yarns was of a narrow escape from lynching in British Columbia.

'I was on the bum at the time — camping on the banks of a creek near a village. One day, when I was crossin' the creek, I sees two men hollerin' at one another. Gee! before you would wink, one guy pulls out a revolver an' plugs the other dead. The guy with the revolver beats it, leavin' me standin' up to my knees in the creek, scared to move lest he plugs me too. Some guys come runnin' up hollerin', "Catch the tramp, he done it . . . lynch him." Gee! . . . they got a rope round my neck and dragged me to a tree, me shoutin' like hell, and them takin' no notice! . . . "Say, boys, I guess we'd best ask him some questions before we string him up," says one of them. When I told them what I'd seen they let me go. They knew this guy that done the killin' had been out to bump the other off. Gee! didn't I beat it out of the country in the first freight in case they didn't catch the other guy an' came back for me. Gee! I was never so scared since I was a kid in short pants.'

But Sex was the subject that obsessed the crowd round Scotty's bunk at nights. Once, when asked my idea of a holiday, I replied, 'I'd like to beat my way through the Rockies to the Pacific, and spend a month exploring the coast north of Vancouver in a canoe — fishing, swimming, and pitching a tent on shore at night; moving on in the morning when the mood took me.'

'Gee!' began Oregon, drawing a long breath when I had finished. 'D'you call that a holiday? Say, when I finish here an' git my cheques, I'm goin' into a city, an' I'm goin' to git hold of a whore an' a pile of detective stories that high, an' then I'm going to spend a fortnight in bed. That's what I call a holiday.'

He seemed to voice the sentiments of all but Larry, the crippled Swede.

Oregon's words set them talking of women they had enjoyed in the past.

'I'll never forget the first time I went tae the Bush,' said Dunoon. 'I was only a kid o' seventeen at the time. When we stopped work in the spring we went doon tae Port Arthur. The first place the men made for was a Red Lamp. No' havin' no place tae go, I went in wi' them . . . Goad! What a night

that was! . . .’ Dunoon’s description of the drunken sexual orgy he witnessed that night is unprintable.

As I listened to them relating their sexual experiences one after another, it struck me that conventional morality was unknown to them, and that it was only men who presented a sanctimonious front to the world who sniggered nastily about sex as they whispered in corners.

‘There’s a lotta guys in the States won’t have their kids taught religion,’ said Oregon, when the subject this night shifted round to the Christian viewpoint. After describing the nomads who wander round America in old automobiles, he proceeded with his story.

‘One night, when I was on the bum, I landed at an auto camp where there was a lot of those guys with dozens of kids runnin’ wild. Just to see what he knew about dif’rent things, I caught hold of one of the kids . . . and gee, but they were wild.

“‘D’you ever say your prayers?’ I asks him.

“‘Prayers?’ says the kid. “‘What d’ya mean, prayers?’”

“‘Why, don’t you pray to God?’”

“‘Gwan, who ya gettin’ at? . . . God? . . . Who’s that guy?’”

“‘Why, don’t you know who God is? He lives up there . . . right up in the sky.’” The kid jest looked at me as if I was bug-house.

“‘Gwan, can it,” he said.

“‘But haven’t you heard of Jesus Christ?’”

“‘Jesus Christ? Nope, who’s he?’”

“‘Why, he’s the son of God that came right down out of the sky to save us all.’”

“‘Yah, ya can’t pull that stuff on me,” he cried runnin’ away.

‘That night when I was sittin’ over my fire cookin’ some grub, his old man came up and gave me hell. “‘Hi, wha’d’ya mean shootin’ all that religious bull at my kid for?’” he hol-lered. “‘Why, I didn’t mean no harm,” I says to him. “‘Well lookit, stranger, if yuh wantta keep yur health, jest lay off my kid. I’ve kep’ him off religious bull ’cause I don’t want him spoilt.’

§ XVIII

At our next halt the villagers arranged a concert and a cricket match. At the concert a small, pallid, under-nourished waif from a Glasgow slum created a furore by his virtuosity on the mouth-organ. Being in a mood for 'funny stuff', the audience received my bangings and rumblings on their tinny upright piano with a discouraging lukewarmness.

'Pearls before swine, Johnnie,' said Roy loyally afterwards. The landscape at this point was tumbled into hillocks; the Eagle Hills to the south-west filled me with a longing to see the grandeur of the Rockies, three hundred miles further west. Rumours of our proceeding to Edmonton set my hopes soaring, only to be dashed when finally we were hitched to a freight one day, and taken east to within an hour's journey of Saskatoon.

§ XIX

On the Saturday night before we moved eastwards, Mr. Caldbeck drove me back in a Ford sedan to the scene of my first musical triumph. As we bumped over the rutted road of sun-baked mud which ran past patches of white alkali-encrusted ground, reedy lochans, and occasional clumps of scrub, Mr. Caldbeck outlined the brief history of the settlement of this stretch of prairie.

That night, after a concert which was somehow flat after the intense excitement of the first night, I slept in a bright well-furnished room in a boarding-house. It was sheer bliss to slip in between cool white sheets after my Spartan bunk.

The village slumbered under a blazing sun when I sought out Mr. Caldbeck after breakfast next morning. I discovered him seated with Holwick, the section-hand who played the piano, in a tiny office attached to a large workshop with tool-littered benches, stacks of planks, old buggies, heaps of wood shavings and an all-pervading smell of paint.

Mr. Caldbeck handed me a Saskatoon journal containing

an enthusiastic report of my first concert. I was amazed to learn that I had played Schubert and Mozart, and that I was a 'well-known professor of music in one of our great cities'.

Saying that I would like to send it to my parents in Scotland, I snipped the paragraph out of the news-sheet.

'Why don't you leave that railroad gang and settle down here?' asked Mr. Caldbeck. He shelled and ate pea-nuts from a brown paper bag as he talked. 'You would get plenty of pupils . . . I'll take you round a few farms to-day and prove it to you.'

Remembering Winnipeg and my defeats there, I said it would take capital to buy a piano and so on.

'I'll lend you money if that's the trouble,' said Mr. Caldbeck promptly. 'Why, there's lots of ways you could make money here. There's that empty store at the corner. You could take that over and sell gramophones, pianos, records, and odds and ends, as a side-line. You could build a hut like this for five hundred dollars — get a Ford car to run out to the farms and towns in. Then you could give recitals all over this part of the world . . . It costs nothing to advertise, you just get a general 'phone call sent round the district — everybody in Canada is on the 'phone. You could charge a dollar a head for your concerts and clear up a hundred dollars in an hour.'

He made it sound like a fairy-tale. I groaned inwardly at my incompetence as a teacher. Here was the opportunity of a lifetime and I was unfitted to seize it!

§ x x

A farmer drove Holwick off for the day. Mr. Caldbeck took me for a stroll round the village.

When my guide spoke of my settling down among them, the blacksmith sniffed and 'reckoned there was a durn good music-teacher in the next town'.

The garage-man philosophized on holidays. 'Say, it don't pay a man to go havin' holidays an' things like that. Gee, I thought I could do it. I used to go to Prince Albert every Fall

an' go huntin' . . . You bet I had a dandy time up there, yes, sir . . . But one day I guessed I would have a look over my books just to see how things stood. Golly, I found I was all on the wrong side an' headin' for a big smash . . . Yes, sir, it sure shook me up. I guess I just sit around the ole wood-pile now an' attend to business.'

The owner of two huge wolfhounds stroked their ears and talked of their hunting prowess. 'This ole feller here killed three coyotes last winter,' he said to me. 'But I guess he's gettin' old now. See, he's got a sore paw . . . poor ole son.' He patted the dog's head affectionately.

We called on the section-foreman. Before emigrating he had been an unemployed cooper in Lancashire. 'Best thing ah ever did, by goom,' he cried enthusiastically. 'Ah knew knowt of railroads when ah got this job two years ago, and now ah'm boss of t'show. And this house is mine! . . . no more landlords. The Old Country's fine, but it's no place for a working man with a family.'

His wife described the hardships he made no reference to.

'It's cruel working on the track in winter,' she said. 'Ah've seen him called out in blizzards in forty-below weather to replace a broken rail in the middle of the night.'

Then Mr. Caldbeck drove me out into the shimmering prairie. We called at large farms. Between biographical sketches of the owners of the places we passed and stopped at, my companion talked of his business. 'I built all those barns you see around here,' he said. 'It's difficult to get money in, though. If I could get a buyer I would sell my business for five thousand dollars and go back to the Old Country tomorrow.'

We had dinner in a bright shining farm kitchen where the talk was of the weather and the chances of a good harvest.

By supper time we had reached a small town which had avenues of young trees and brand-new flat-roofed schools and public buildings of red brick and concrete, as if the inhabitants had all read Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* and had determined to profit by it.

We had a meal in a house there, then began our homeward

journey. In every house we had called at I had played on a new, highly polished, upright piano. Like a kind of Boswell, Mr. Caldbeck had exhibited me and lauded me to the skies.

'There you are, that's about seven pupils you could have got to-day,' he said, during the long run back to the extragang. 'Look here,' he said suddenly, 'You're not in debt, are you?'

'No,' I replied. Though I owed the Bradfords about fifteen dollars for board, I had earned forty dollars already.

'If money's the trouble, I'll advance you as much as you like.'

I found it extremely difficult to thank my new friend, but I was determined not to settle down as a pianoforte teacher until I had learned sufficient to satisfy my conscience. To live as a charlatan, fearing exposure every hour of the day, was unthinkable!

I wondered if I had been wise, as, after bidding him farewell, I watched the tail-light of Mr. Caldbeck's car dwindle eastwards.

§ x x i

The gang worked eastwards, a day here and there, and one evening, after passing through Saskatoon, we were banged and clattered into a siding and left in the darkness.

When I looked out of the bunk-car next morning I saw a village of some two score houses huddling close to the track; there was a vast background of stone-littered prairie.

We spent the best part of a week at this place.

On Dominion Day, the Welshman went off to Saskatoon on holiday, leaving in command the squat Russian who superintended the working of the jacks.

I thought ruefully of the 'coming-of-age' party I had planned for myself before I thought of Canada, as I toiled shovel in hand through my twenty-first birthday. A letter from my mother enclosing a five-dollar bill was the only reminder of my former existence.

Roy and I went in search of a piano that evening.

When I said that I was a musician, a woman seated in the veranda of the first house we came to, showed us into her living-room. A copy of Liszt's 'Liebestraume' stood on the music-stand of the upright piano. 'My daughter studies,' explained the woman. 'Her teacher comes from Saskatoon . . . She means to get her degree before she finishes.'

A quiet determined eighteen-year-old girl entered the room as she spoke.

When I began playing I was appalled at the stiffness of my wrists and fingers, they seemed weighted with lead.

I discussed the second cadenza of Liszt's 'O Lieb' with the girl. She described how her teacher faked it, saying, 'The public don't know any better, anyway.'

With a heavy inflexible touch, the girl played Sinding's 'Rustle of Spring'.

'She doesn't make the piano sing like you do,' said her mother in perplexity. 'I don't know how it is . . . I've spent a lot of money on her. But I expect it'll come in time.'

'Yes,' I said diplomatically, 'I expect a singing touch will come later.' Inwardly I added, 'Your daughter would be better employed learning typewriting.'

'That girl played extraordinarily well, but she's got no soul,' said Roy afterwards. 'You are losing your artistry, Johnnie,' he added. 'You must get away from this country. A man like you should be in London moving in art circles, not out here, labouring among rough uncultured people.'

London! . . . Art circles! I smiled wanly and replied, 'I'm afraid, Roy, there's no possibility of my ever knowing anything else now but pick-and-shovel work . . . It's all I'm fit for now!'

'Oh, you never know,' declared Roy stoutly. 'Strange things happen in this life.'

'Let's talk of something else,' I said miserably.

§ x x i i

During the Welshman's absence, the squat Russian sacked an inoffensive farm labourer from Surrey. A deputation

was sent from the thirty odd Britishers to deliver the ultimatum to the Russian that we would go on strike unless he gave the Englishman back his job. A grunt and a shrug of the shoulders was the Russian's reply. As one man, the Britishers threw down their shovels and walked back to the bunk-cars.

'It's the same all over Canada,' cried one man bitterly. 'A white can't earn a living for those bloody Bohunks. The country's full of them, and as soon as they get the chance they kick the white man out. It's rifles and bayonets that's needed to clear the bastards back to their own bloody country . . . They've ruined Canada for the white man.'

An angry growl of approval met the speaker's words — the burning glare of the sun and the monotony of the work was making everyone savage and irritable.

'If we let this pass he'll sack the whole lot o' us whenever he gets the chance,' cried Dunoon, indignantly voicing the general opinion.

My fiery youthful blood boiled. To have a lot of stinking lousy Bolsheviks riding rough-shod over one in a British colony! It was monstrous.

I would have cheerfully gone to war with Russia that afternoon.

§ x x i i i

'Now what the hell's all the trouble?' demanded the Welshman on his return. He called the Russian to his side, and, swaying on his feet, addressed us:

'We've bin goin' 'long all ri' up till now,' he began. 'But as soon's my bloody back's turned you go on strike! . . . Come on, somebody speak!' he bawled in a drunken passion. 'Le's here wha's all about.'

When the Russian was asked to verify the story of his discharging the Englishman, he shook his head and lied in an outrageous fashion.

'See here, boys,' shouted the Welshman, quelling the savage roar that went up from the assembled Britishers, with upraised hand, 'I've been a soldier too . . . I've been over the bloody

top 'n the front line trenches like you boys. An' I'm goin' t'stand by you boys's long's I can. But you! . . . you bloody bastard'n Bohunk . . . What the hell do you think you are, you Russian scum?' The Welshman's voice as he thrust a fist under the scared Russian's nose, rose in a shrill crescendo. 'You're sacked! . . . You're sacked! . . . D'you hear, you ——.'

A cheer of triumph rose from the Britishers.

'Now get back to work,' cried the Welshman, making for his bunk-car.

§ x x i v

We moved two hundred miles further east. During the long leisurely journey the sourdough who sat across the table near me at meal-times, told his story. It was like a novel of Jack London's. A tale of a nomadic life in wild places. For years, a chain-man with a survey party in the 'Barren Lands' and the Mackenzie River country — of trapping, prospecting, lumbering; there was nothing that grave-voiced man, with his air of natural dignity, did not know about out-door life in North America.

'If you young fellows don't give up this kind of life now,' he concluded, 'you'll find yourselves in my position at my age. Just look at me; I've been doing this kind of thing for twenty years and I just make the same money as you fellows do as beginners . . . It's a dead end. I'm just in the same position as when I started . . . I haven't five cents in the bank and I'm twenty years older. This kind of life makes you unfitted for anything else.'

Realizing the truth behind the speaker's words, I saw myself condemned to a life of construction camps, lumber-camps, and farms. 'I must escape before this country gets a grip on me,' I told myself in a panic. What did it matter if the people in the Old Country called me a failure for returning home! What was their opinion to me after what I'd gone through?

As we journeyed eastwards the aspect of the country changed; wooded bluffs appeared; once a horseman galloped down a trail, like a cowboy out of a Wild West film. Pine

woods slid past, and small lakes with Indian wigwams on their shores. My eager eyes were delighted with the romantic Canada of my boyhood dreams.

At last we were left in a siding, beside a loch which mirrored tall pines. The railroad at this point was carried along half-way up the north slope of a valley carved out of the prairie by the Assiniboine river, which had changed its course at one time and now flowed through a valley to the south.

§ x x v

As the shovels and hand-cars were being unloaded from a box-car next morning, I suddenly found myself in the midst of a wild scuffle. Two partially disabled ex-servicemen had acted as flagmen since the gang started work — their duties consisted solely of waving a red flag to warn approaching trains of our presence. The Austrian straw-boss had evidently given the flags to two pasty-faced relations from Saskatoon, for I saw the ex-servicemen trying frantically to pull the flags from the newcomers' hands. The Bohunks nearest the struggle rushed to their countrymen's assistance, and, seizing crow-bars and shovels, the Britishers closed together.

I had made no move, as the situation had developed in less time than it takes to tell. 'What the hell's going on here?' a voice yelled in my ear, and knocking me down in his violent rush into the centre of the heaving mass of men struggling for the flags, the Welshman quelled the ugliest situation I had yet seen. By the time I had jumped to my feet and seized the nearest shovel the riot was over.

The Austrian and his pasty-faced relatives left for Saskatoon by the first train and the flags were restored to their original possessors.

Iowa shook his head when he was offered the position of straw-boss. 'I don't want to be no boss,' he said. 'I'm far happier where I am among the boys.'

§ X X V I

The Welshman left us and a girny old Scot took his place. We began working eastwards. There was no wind in the valley to temper the heat of the July sun. I seemed to grow stronger and fitter every day. Ginger and I were caught by the old Scot once, displaying our strength by carrying a two hundredweight railroad tie each in our arms.

'Hi, drop those ties . . . What the hell d'ye think ye're playin' at . . . D'ye want to strain yourselves, you doggone young fools,' he bawled.

Sometimes when I looked up from my work, and filling my lungs with pure warm dry air, saw how good the world looked, I felt like bursting into wild rhapsodies of song. I longed to be a tenor and sing Siegmund's 'Winter storms have waned in the winsome May'. Never had I known such physical fitness and freedom from worry.

In the evenings we roamed the countryside in threes and fours, talking about our past and future and gossiping about the gang. We swam in the muddy Assiniboine and in lochans which reflected wild flaring sunsets and our own nakedness. There were no villages, and only one farm in the whole valley; a more simple, blissful existence than those last days could not be imagined.

§ X X V I I

'I wonder what'll happen tae the Professor here?' mused Dunoon during a pause. The crowd round Scotty's bunk had been speculating on what the future held in store for them.

'Huh!' began Scotty, looking me steadily in the eyes as he spoke. 'He'll go back tae the Auld Country an' write a book aboot a' this.' Scotty waved a toothpick round the bunk-car. 'He'll put ye a' intae his book.'

I laughed at the absurdity of his quiet deliberate words; writing books seemed to me on a par with composing great symphonic works.

The others, believing Scotty to have solved the mystery of my presence among them at last, clamoured to be put into my book.

'Put me intae yer book, Professor,' pleaded the little white-faced mouth-organ virtuoso.

'Me tae, Professor,' shouted Dunoon eagerly.

'And me . . . and me,' shouted the others in chorus.

All this attention centred on me, proved too much for Lord Godalmighty. 'You know, you fellows,' he broke in haughtily, 'I don't really have to do this kind of work. I've got thousands of pounds behind me . . . My people in the Old Country are in a good position. I could go back to England to-morrow if I liked . . . I like this kind of free out-door life, though.'

An astonished silence followed this outburst. Scotty's face was a study in contempt. 'Christ,' he sneered, 'only a bloody fool would work if he didnae have tae. Goad! catch me sittin' here if I had a pile o' dough behind me.'

The dead silence which followed was broken by a snigger from Dunoon which set everyone rolling about convulsed with laughter.

Lord Godalmighty, as psychologically interesting as Larry of the Immigration Hall, stalked huffily to his bunk and nursed his wounded feelings in a dignified silence for the rest of the night.

§ x x v i i i

The whining of our new boss and the stifling heat in the deep cutting we were working in set up a wave of restlessness one morning.

'Yep,' declared Iowa, who was tamping beside Ginger and I. 'There's good money in the States. They ain't scared to pay a man for his work there . . . Not like this Goddam country, where they look for suckers like you boys an' get you to work like mules for thirty lousy cents an hour. Gee! you young fellows're crazy to waste your lives in Canada . . . Beat it over the Border . . . Get down south and see somethin' . . . This country'll never be any good in your time.'

Others began extolling the United States as an earthly paradise. The vast population, the incalculable wealth, and the opportunities awaiting one in this Eldorado only a day's journey away, fired my imagination. I had been working for over six weeks now, and the seventy-odd dollars to my credit gave me a feeling of freedom.

I questioned Iowa on the chances of riding a freight from Emerson across the International Boundary.

'Gee, it's easy enough if you're careful, an' don't go "riding the rods",' he replied, adding a wealth of sound advice from a lifetime's experience.

'Will we chance it?' I said impulsively, catching Ginger's questioning eye.

'Sure, I'll go if you go,' he replied eagerly.

'When will we start?'

'Now, if you like,' said Ginger recklessly.

'Right, here goes,' I laughed loudly, and my shovel described an arc in the air, the sun flashing on its polished blade. It was followed by Ginger's.

CHAPTER XIV

§ I

GINGER and I lay among the brushwood at the side of the track listening intently. After bidding farewell to the gang, we had hidden ourselves in the bushes near the huge tank where the freight-trains stopped to take in water.

For miles eastwards I could see down the valley. For a time, my thoughts followed the white ribbon of railroad with its two threads of polished steel back to Winnipeg, our objective meantime. The sun had gone down and the warm air was still, as if the valley had caught its breath to listen with us. Whisperings of little wild things moving in the bushes and grasses, mingled with the distant voices of our former companions. Beyond the black bulk of the water-tank, and through a belt of tall conifers, the lochan mirrored the night clouds, the opalescent sky, and black spearheads of pines; a single light from the farmhouse pierced the blackness beyond.

Fireflies dancing in the gathering dusk recalled Longfellow's 'Hiawatha', and the dim dusty class-rooms of Glasgow High School, where I had so often dreamed of roaming the world in search of adventure.

At the end of the valley a great golden moon peered over the skyline, then hoisted itself aloft, flooding the night with its radiance. The sounds from the camp died away and an unearthly stillness fell over the world.

Suddenly I thought I detected a faint tremor in the air.

'Did you hear?' I asked Ginger excitedly. He nodded eagerly, and, as the faint far-off stirring from the west reached our ears again, I trembled with excitement. A long-drawn wail reached us in a mournful whisper. The eeriness of it made me catch my breath and sent an icy shiver down my spine. It sounded like some nameless ghostly thing wandering about a desolated planet.

After a long interval the wail was repeated, loud enough this time to be recognizable as the whistle of the freight which had set the rails vibrating. In a long-drawn crescendo the panting of the locomotive and the confused rattling and jiggling of box-cars filled the valley with a hideous uproar.

When the engine clanked to a standstill and stood hissing in the shadow of the water-tank, I noticed some flat-cars half-way down the long freight. Calling to Ginger I ran towards them and clambered up on the first, finding that it was loaded with bars of pig-iron.

'Gee! it's easy jumpin' a freight,' chuckled Ginger, as we lay down on the pig-iron with our kit-bags as pillows.

After a ten minutes, pause the train lurched off again.

On the placid face of the lochan the moon was a white disc, and the pines long black feathers, when we hauled out past the battered old box-cars which had been our home all summer. It was too beautiful a night to sleep, so I sat up, drawing my raincoat around my shoulders as the thin prairie air was icy cold. All silvered by the moon and casting inky shadows, the birches and willows by the side of the track looked unreal. My companion slept. Looking from him to the shadowy moonlit world, I found it difficult to believe that it was not all a dream, and that I was the one who slept, and that presently I would wake up in my bedroom at home in Scotland.

§ 11

The valley had given way to open prairie, the moon had soared half across the sky, and the monotonous rhythm of the clicking wheels below had lulled me into a state between sleeping and waking, when I became dully conscious of the fact that I was watching little tongues of flame licking the underside of the box-car in front. I struggled against an overpowering desire to fall asleep. The picture my imagination painted, of the whole train ablaze and Ginger and I buried beneath a mass of burning wreckage, made me spring up in a

panic. 'Hi!' I yelled, shaking my sleeping companion roughly. 'Get up, the train's on fire.'

Ginger staggered sleepily to his feet. We threw ourselves full-length at the end of our flat-car and stared at the blazing undercarriage.

'It's the grease in the axle box that's caught fire,' I cried.

'What'll we do?' shouted Ginger in alarm, as the flames leaped higher.

'God! We'll have to do something,' I replied desperately, feeling hopelessly trapped. 'I'm going back to the caboose to warn the brakemen and get them stop the train.'

I ran along the flat-cars, leaping the spaces between, and was scrambling to the top of a box-car when I felt the train slacken speed. There were lights ahead in the distance.

'Come on, we'll beat it . . . They'll say we set the car on fire,' I jerked out, when I got back to Ginger and found him still fascinated by the flames.

Jumping from the train which had slowed to a crawl, and making a wide circuit, we entered the little railroad divisional town from the east.

To our relief, the freight we had quitted was standing in the depot with no sign of fire about it. In the all-night restaurant, where we had a cup of coffee, and a sandwich, I pumped two hobos for information about east-bound freights.

'There's a fast freight pullin' out in two hours' time, take a chance on it, buddy,' one of them said in a low tone, his eyes on the back of a burly brakeman standing outside the door.

After lying down in the waiting-room for an hour, Ginger and I went out to reconnoitre. Though it was three o'clock in the morning, locomotives were moving about the round-house and there was a constant coming and going of overalled men.

'What about getting into the train while it's quiet?' suggested Ginger.

Walking away from the lighted platform and the suspicious eyes of brakemen, we climbed into one of a number of steel-sided cars. It was loaded with baulks of timber. A hobo started up in alarm when we dropped in beside him. Engaging

him in a whispered conversation, I discovered that he had come from San Francisco, via Seattle and Vancouver. 'Thousands out of work an' sleepin' in the parks everywhere I've been,' he told me.

Snugly hidden in a space between the logs, we heard the brakesmen tramp past, then, as dawn was breaking, we began to move.

'We're off,' cried Ginger excitedly, peeping over the side at the round-house slipping past.

'Keep your head down, you fool, d'you want to be thrown off,' hissed the hobo.

'Gee! this is fine,' chuckled Ginger, ducking his head.

'Say, what you guys doin' there?' grated a new voice with startling suddenness.

We looked up to see a burly brakesman glaring down from the roof of the box-car in front. Ginger and I looked at one another in dismay and then back at the grim figure above.

'Where d'you guys think you're goin'?' demanded the brakesman.

'Winnipeg,' I answered coolly.

'Well, ye ain't goin' to Winnipeg on this freight . . . Come on, beat it,' he roared, jerking his thumb towards the ground.

Between us we could pitch him off! Was it worth while perhaps going to prison for? No . . . he might break his neck in hitting the ground! So I reasoned as I picked up my kit-bag and straddled over the side of the car, Ginger following suit.

'Come on, you too,' bellowed the brakesman to the hobo who had made no move.

As I leaped from the train and fell on my hands and knees at the side of the track, I heard the hobo say in a dangerous tone which recalled the tales I had heard of hobos drawing revolvers on belligerent brakesmen, 'I'm going to see if it's O.K. first.'

When the last car had clattered past Ginger and I looked at each other in disgust, then stumbling over to a pile of old ties lay down, and, though it was bitterly cold, I fell asleep at once.

§ III

I was roughly awakened. I swore roundly as I opened one sleep-drugged eye to see Ginger bending over me. 'Come on, wake up, here's another freight coming,' he shouted excitedly.

A huge ugly locomotive, belching smoke and cinders and shaking the earth, loomed into my consciousness. Somehow I struggled to my feet, seized my kitbag, and stumbled sleepily forward as Ginger cried, 'Get up on that flat-car.'

We collided, and Ginger's outstretched hand saved me from falling under the passing wheels. In some miraculous way I managed to seize the iron steps and swing myself up to safety.

Shaken by my narrow escape, I sat watching the sun come up. By a shaky trestle bridge we crawled over a great river with broad sandbanks. There were mechanical navvies and a construction camp at the other side. 'We might get a job there if we get off,' I said drowsily to myself as I fell asleep.

When next I opened my eyes, it was to discover that the sun was well up and that we had been side-tracked to await the passing of another train. Ginger wakened up. We were ravenous, and there was neither village nor house in sight.

Minutes dragged past with leaden feet.

Too hungry and dispirited to hide, we lay watching a brakesman trudge up towards the front of the train.

'Hullo, boys,' he called cheerily. 'Where you makin' for?'

'Winnipeg,' I shouted.

'I'd jump on the fast-freight that's comin' along behind,' he cried as he passed. 'It'll take you a fortnight to make Winnipeg on this Goddam freight.'

The train he referred to thundered through at a good thirty miles an hour, so we had no option but to remain where we were.

It was midday when we dropped off at the outskirts of Portage-la-Prairie.

'I'll die if I don't eat soon,' I declared, as we made our way through a potato field to the houses.

'I've got no money,' said Ginger.

'But I have,' I replied, my mind wholly occupied with thoughts of roast pork and the kind of pie I would finish up with.

After the bustle of harvest-time, I was amazed to find the wide dusty main street well-nigh deserted. Every step raised memories as I led Ginger to the Chinese café I had frequented a year previously.

'Well,' I began, as we finished our meal, 'I don't know what your opinion is, but I think "riding freights" is a vastly over-rated pastime. What do you say if we finish the journey in comfort by passenger train?'

'But I've no money to buy a ticket,' protested Ginger.

'I've got enough money,' I said testily. 'You can pay me back when you cash your cheques.'

'What will we do now?' asked Ginger, as we walked along Higgins Avenue on our arrival in Winnipeg.

'Do? . . . Why, look for a room of course,' I replied shortly.

§ I V

An old couple seated in the veranda of a rooming-house near the British and Foreign Bible Society's premises, called out, 'You fellows lookin' for a room?'

'We are,' I replied.

'Come in, right in, strangers . . . we got lottsa room,' they cried, beckoning eagerly.

The stout grim-visaged wife showed us upstairs to a back bedroom containing two single beds, two chairs, and a small dressing-table. 'It'll be two bucks each a week,' she said harshly, holding out her hand. I was left with a dollar.

'What do we do now?' asked Ginger, when our landlady had gone.

'Do,' I cried in exasperation, thinking how like a turnip the speaker looked, with his red hair and round red vacant face. 'Why, have a wash, then something to eat, then go to bed.'

'But what about jumping a freight to Emerson and going to the States?'

'Look here,' I said curtly. 'I've had enough of freights for one day. If you're so desperately keen on getting to the States to-night, get on with it . . . I'm not holding you back.'

§ v

Next morning, after calling at the C.P.R. offices for our cheques, amounting to over seventy dollars each, I left Ginger to pay a few calls.

First I went up to Mrs. Black's flat.

'You remember Harry an' that young brother of Mrs. Berg's that was in prison,' she began, when I asked after old acquaintances. 'Well, when little Slowacki went to slave 'is guts out for 'is wife in the Bush, those two young smart-alecs went to live with his wife an' that other chippie that's goin' blind. While they were all livin' together Mrs. Slowacki fell sick an' had to be taken to hospital to be operated on for gall-stones . . . Would ye believe it! . . . After the pore bitch takin' them in off the streets, Harry an' young Berg sold her furniture to a Jew while she was in hospital . . . her sewin'-machine an' everythin' . . . The other told the police an' they were taken up and charged for theft. Then . . . Christ! what some women'll do for a lotta trashy scum! . . . When the trial comes off, Slowacki's wife went up an' told the court that she had said they were to sell the furniture 'cause her husband hadn't sent her any money.'

'And what about Hareshaw and Red?' I asked.

'Hareshaw! . . . Huh, that crazy ——,' sniffed Mrs. Black. 'He left a fortnight ago, takin' his "lady barber" with 'im. An' him with a wife an' kids in the Old Country . . . pore little devils . . . Gee! if I'd known what his "lady barber" was when she came askin' me to take 'er in, I'd have kicked her backside down the bloody stairs for her. Red? . . . He's got a job as a bar-tender in an hotel. An' Billie's boy-friend has come back from the States to marry 'er.'

'Oh!' breathed Mrs. Berg. She looked startled and hesitated before inviting me into the flat.

'Is Erik in?' I asked, as I entered the living-room.

'No, he's out West, cooking for a railroad gang,' she replied.

While thinking how thin and drawn she looked, a slight movement caused me to swing round. I was astounded to see Harry framed in the bedroom doorway.

'Hullo,' he said, grinning sarcastically. 'I thought you were out West.'

'So I was . . . I'm just back . . .' I paused awkwardly, and the situation beginning to dawn on me, looked from Mrs. Berg's pale face to the sneering Harry.

'Didn't you get that waiter's job in the C.P.R. hotel at Banff after all?' I asked, to break the painful silence that fell between us.

Muttering something, Harry evaded my eyes.

'Phew! It's hot in here,' I said. The room was stifling and airless; outside the city sweltered in the July sun.

'Take off your coat and be cool, like Harry,' suggested Mrs. Berg, recovering her poise.

Removing my jacket, I hung it over the back of a chair.

'Can I speak to you in private for a minute?' asked Mrs. Berg.

'Certainly,' I replied, following her into the bedroom.

'Could I bum two dollars from you, Walker?' she began awkwardly. 'Erik went away a month ago and he has sent nothing at all since he went . . . I've pawned his winter coat and everything . . . We've got no food in the house.'

'Oh, I am sorry,' I said in distress. While I was explaining that I would hurry back as soon as I had cashed my cheques, I heard a slight crackling of paper in the other room. My heart gave a bound. Harry was stealing the cheques from my jacket pocket!

Icily calm, I walked into the living-room. It was just as I suspected. Harry sat rigidly on the chair my jacket was hanging on, guilt written all over his face.

'Well, I'll go now,' I said casually as I lifted my jacket. With my eyes fixed meaningly on the petrified Harry, I put my hand into the ticket-pocket, and finding the slips of paper gone, said in feigned surprise, 'Why, that's funny, I thought I had put my cheques in this pocket!'

Going slowly through my pockets I made inane remarks about how 'funny' it was, never taking my eyes off Harry's haggard face. God! those cheques represented six weeks' slavery! I would kill him if he didn't give them up!

Something dropped under Harry's chair, and, lying straight below his loose hanging hand, I saw a roll of crumpled green paper.

'Why, there they are,' I cried in a highly artificial tone of surprise. 'They must have fallen out of my pocket . . . how strange!'

Like two actors holding a scene as the curtain falls, Harry sat mute in his chair and Mrs. Berg stood in the bedroom doorway, strained and silent, when I threw a last glance round the room.

§ V I I

Behind the bar of a dingy hotel in a street running off Portage Avenue, I found Red wiping tumblers with a none too clean dish-towel.

'Hullo,' I cried briskly. 'How's things?'

'Christ! . . . It's you, Walker,' exclaimed Red, staring wide-eyed. 'I didn't recognize you . . . God, but you look fit . . . Where've you been?'

'Out West, working for the C.N.R.' I studied Red's pasty face and dark-ringed eyes curiously.

'God!' groaned Red. 'That's where I should have gone instead of sticking in Winnipeg. This place is sending me to hell with drink and women. Lend us a dollar,' he said, accompanying me to the door when I turned to go.

'I haven't a cent,' I said hastily.

'Ach, you're a liar . . . Come on, you've got tons of money . . . I want to go to a cricket match this afternoon.'

Considering this excuse an insult to my intelligence, I made good my escape and hastened to cash my cheques.

'I'm beginning to learn what parasitical things cities are,' I reflected, as, feeling very old, wise, and cynical, I waited for Ginger.

§ VIII

Ginger and I went shopping. I bought a hat, some under-clothing, and a pair of shoes suitable for city wear.

'Let's have a week's holiday,' I cried, in a gay carefree mood now that I had a fat roll of dollar bills in my pocket.

Our new hats set at a jaunty angle, we swaggered along Main Street towards Portage Avenue.

A puffy Jewish real-estate agent beckoned us into his office and tried to induce us to buy building lots in Edmonton. The Jew went white with rage, when, after half an hour's persuasive sales talk, I cut him short with a cynical 'Say, you won't let anybody buy those lots before we get back. I'm beating it home for my cheque-book right now.'

Then we spent an hour playing billiards, and, after a walk round Eaton's Store, found ourselves contemplating the river of automobiles flowing along Portage Avenue.

'I need some tobacco,' said Ginger. As his dullness was getting on my nerves, I jumped at this chance of escaping for a time, and called on Max Reimer.

'Gee! . . . It's you, Jim,' cried Max, wringing my hand impulsively after a blank moment. 'Gosh, I didn't recognize you. You're brown as a nigger . . . Gee, but you sure look a husky guy now. Where you been?'

He listened eagerly to my adventures. 'Boy!' he sighed, 'I wish I could spend a coupla years toughin' it about the country with you. Gee! It makes me sick to be stuck in the city an' you seein' everythin' and gettin' a kick outta life . . . Look at you, you mutt! . . . bustin' with strength, and me crawlin' around like a half-drowned pup.'

Max's face darkened as he remembered something. 'Say,'

he said abruptly, 'do you know that that guy Roscoe's back in Winnipeg . . . Yep, came back a fortnight ago with another guy, Joe Macrae.'

Mr. Reimer appeared and nodded distantly. 'So you've got back to Winnipeg again, Jim,' he said. 'Have you been out to see Mrs. Reimer yet?'

'Not yet,' I replied. 'I'm going round to my old digs to get a decent suit before I call.'

Excited by the news of Ralph's return, I hastened back to meet Ginger. At last I would be able to get first-hand information about home!

§ 1 x

'I'm going out to-night,' I told Ginger over supper in a Chinese restaurant. 'You can hop into a cinema if you get fed up with your own company.'

Ginger had become a problem. How was I to get rid of him? Divorced from the gang, Ginger was devastating. We lived in absolutely different mental worlds — his illiteracy, vacant grin, and total lack of that witty comment on the comedy of life which one associates with Irishmen, got on my nerves.

Norah and Lilian Bradford, chaperoned by their uncle Jake, were staying alone in the house off Broadway, the rest of the family being on holiday at Winnipeg Beach.

'Whadya want to come back to the city for?' snorted the uncle, when Norah showed me into the living-room. 'You young fellows should keep away from cities . . . You're all the same . . . bummin' around wastin' time. Get back to the West where you came from. It'll make a man of you.'

Ignoring the uncle, I said to Norah, 'Do you mind if I take my suitcase away? I've got nothing to wear but the clothes I stand up in.'

'Certainly, Jimmy,' she replied gently, her look telling me that she was sorry that I was wandering about like a homeless dog. 'Have you got all you want?' she asked, when I came downstairs, suitcase in hand.

'Yes, thank you. I've left my dinner-jacket, my music, and other things, in the cabin-trunk,' I added meaningly, as I left the house.

It occurred to me, as I carried my heavy case along tree-lined Broadway, that I was no longer the honest upright youth I had prided myself on being when I landed at Quebec—one who was loyal to his friends, king, and country, sympathetic to beggars' tales of woe, and who never left a debt undischarged.

I was growing up and becoming a man!

§ x

Wearing a grey lounge suit and my new shoes and hat, I called on the Reimers. Mrs. Reimer and Natalie insisted on talking unnecessarily loudly about Ralph, the social standing of his relations, and the 'three lovely new suits' he had brought back from Scotland. When I tried to talk of my six weeks in Saskatchewan their yawning indifference froze me into a perplexed silence.

Feeling lonely, hurt, and puzzled, I sought out Ralph.

Ralph was in bed sick, said Joe Macrae, leading me up to an attic in the rooming-house Ralph had stayed in before.

Ralph was sitting up in bed, facing the door.

'What the hell do you want here?' he grated, when I went into the room.

Having looked forward to a joyful reunion and a long talk on old times, I stopped in bewilderment.

'Why, I came to see you,' I replied.

'What the hell do you want to see me about? . . . I'm not going to lend you money, if that's your game.'

'I didn't come to borrow your filthy money,' I cried, flaring into a passion, 'I've got plenty of money . . . I came . . .'

'Jesus Christ! . . . Where the hell did you get that bloody awful looking suit?' shouted Ralph, pointing at my clothes amid a peal of derisive laughter. 'Christ, I wouldn't put it on

a bloody scarecrow! No wonder Mrs. Reimer said you'd become "a right young Bohunk".'

Ralph's face was darkened and contorted with a hatred that appalled me. The venomous tone of his words seared into my brain. Now I understood! Being reduced to labouring for a livelihood made me a social pariah in the eyes of these pitiful, narrow-minded, jealous, revengeful, lower-middle class people I had been reared among!

Shaking with rage and outraged pride, I threw back my head and said coldly: 'Roscoe, as far as I am concerned you are dead . . . You no longer exist for me . . . I never want to hear your name again. I mean that, and it won't be any use trying to recognize me if you ever meet me in the street.'

'Ha, ha,' broke in Ralph with a sardonic laugh. 'As if I would ever want to look at a bloody tramp like you.'

When I quitted the room almost weeping with rage, Joe came downstairs with me, quietly sympathetic. He implored me to take him away with me on the next railroad gang that left Winnipeg. He wanted to be away from Winnipeg at all costs.

I walked blindly in the midst of a brain-storm. 'Because I work with my hands,' I soliloquized, 'I am unclean — no longer a fit associate for my former friends. A Bohunk! . . . A little piece of dirt to be trampled on! . . . God! to think that people are so vile! . . . What difference does my father's bankruptcy make to me? Does it mean that I thereby lose my intelligence, my education, my right to be regarded as a human being? . . . Oh God! what a world! . . . Rotten, sordid, grovelling, money-grubbing swine! . . . Dignity of labour! . . . Democracy! . . . Christianity! . . . All a lot of bloody bunk! Now I know what to expect from them all! . . . Now that he's down, let's have a bloody good kick at him.'

With a sudden determination to treat the world as it treated me, I squared my shoulders. Someday I would get my revenge! I would stop shrinking from life and for every blow I received I would strike one back, harder if possible! 'Turn the other cheek' was admirable advice to children to keep them peaceful, but no philosophy for a twentieth-century adult!

For a week Ginger and I lived together. We lay long in bed in the mornings, ate in Chinese restaurants, played billiards, rowed on the Red River at River and Elm Park, went to cinemas at nights, and grew to hate the sight of each other.

I came across the South African brothers, Durham, and a young Irishman, in a pool-room in Main Street one day. They told me the gang had been brought into Winnipeg to be reformed into a 'construction gang' for railroad extension work in the Goose Lake country, and that they were all four undergoing treatment for syphilis contracted from a negress in a town they had spent a day at.

Two days afterwards I found a card lying on my bed with 'Gone West with Oregon, Trescott,' scribbled across it in pencil.

'Well, that's fine,' I said to myself. 'Ginger'll get on better with Oregon than with me. Manual labour is all Ginger is fitted for, and Oregon will teach him all that is to be known about the wilds.'

Meanwhile I had met George Broxford, Slim, and Patrick O'Shea, all old acquaintances from the Immigration Hall. George moved into my room, and Slim took the room across the passage, Pat who had set up as a house-painter, lived out in the suburbs.

During the day I saw little of George. He had met a girl, and at nights when we lay awake, unable to sleep for the stifling heat, he retailed his attempts to seduce her.

'Geel' he laughed once. 'She believes my dad's a banker in the States, and that I'm in Winnipeg to study Canadian banking methods, and that we're gonna get married whenever I finish my studies.'

Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* was milk and water compared to the raw stuff of life!

Slim and I made half-hearted attempts to find employment, but Winnipeg was in the doldrums, waiting for the harvest rush. My money slowly trickled through my fingers.

It looked as if I would be forced out into the harvest fields again. The thought of another winter on the prairies terrified me.

§ XII

'O'Shea introduced me to a Sinn Fein club, where, as a Scot with a strain of Irish blood, I was welcomed by Dubliners who had taken an active part in the 1917 rebellion.

I enjoyed the experience of mixing with avowed anarchists. They were such charming companions that it was impossible to treat seriously their wild extravagant talk of bombs and blowing up the Manitobian Parliament House. One youth, Terry O'Donnell, was my constant companion for a fortnight, until a stockbroker friend got him a job in a store at the Lake-of-the-Woods.

§ XIII

George got a job as a waiter in a small hotel at Lake Winnipeg, and, left on our own, Slim and I had long earnest talks over our meals, thrashing out our problems from every conceivable angle. If I stayed in Canada and continued to work on farms and railroad gangs, I argued, all my ideals and love of books and music would be ground out of me . . . I would become a moron like Ginger! If I returned to Scotland and proved to be an artistic failure, I would be no worse off than if I condemned myself to a life of manual labour in Canada!

More and more I wanted to feel the wet salt winds of home in my face again; to hear the sound of breaking waves and see white gulls wheeling against blue-black storm clouds; I wanted hills around me, shutting out the mad world; I wanted familiar things — muddy roads, soft grey back-grounds — I wanted to run away from Canadian life, with its hard glaring colours and harsh materialism.

The beginning of August found me with only five dollars left. After telling me that men were getting jobs at the stockyards, shipping cattle through to Liverpool and Glasgow, Slim said one morning, 'A fellow told me yesterday that there would be another trainload of cattle going to the Old Country any day now.'

Finishing our breakfast we hurried out to the stockyards.

Two hours later a brisk middle-aged man seated at a flat-topped desk was saying, 'Yes, boys, I'm shipping eight hundred steers to Liverpool to-night. I've got some fellows already, but I can manage one more man through to Liverpool . . . The other'll have to take a chance of being signed-on on the ship at Montreal — the shipping agent there has the booking of most of the cattlemen that go on the ship. If you boys want to go to-night you'll have to fix up between yourselves which of you's going to take a chance of getting on board at Montreal.'

Slim and I looked at each other in silence.

I visualized his reunion with wife and children. Hang it! It meant more to Slim than myself!

'You'd better sign on for Liverpool and I'll risk being stranded at Montreal,' I sighed.

'Thanks, old man,' said Slim; quietly, the impulsive way he seized my hand betrayed his agitation.

Our sole duties were to travel with the cattle and see that the men at the railroad divisional points took them out of the box-cars and fed and watered them.

'Things are sure bad just now,' said the dealer, leaning back in his chair after the necessary papers had been signed. 'I'm not makin' a cent out of this deal. I'm only sendin' this shipload to keep up my connection with the dealers in the Old Country.'

With three hours to prepare for the journey, we hurried back to our rooms, pitched our belongings into our bags, purchased some provisions at Eaton's, and had a last meal in Main Street. I paid a flying visit to the Reimers' office to bid farewell to Max, my one loyal friend. Mr. Reimer made me 'phone up his wife. 'I'm not in favour of this going back

to the Old Country business at all, I think you should stick out here,' she said. 'Well,' was her parting shot, 'Good-bye, you've had a fine holiday out of it anyway.'

The sun was sinking towards the western rim of the horizon when the cattle-train pulled out of the stockyards.

Thinking of my fellow-actors in the comedy of life I had played during the last year, I watched Winnipeg dwindle behind. Only the other day Erik Berg had stopped me in Main Street, to ask, with an ugly look in his face, if I knew where Harry was! How white Harry had turned and how he had run, when I had come face to face with him a day or so later! That was a story whose end I would never know!

Human life was a strange and terrible thing, I thought, as I watched the tall office-blocks sink below the skyline. Those gaunt aspiring buildings symbolized a style of life utterly opposed to my shrinking sensitive nature, yet strangely enough, my thoughts were tinged with sadness. A year of my life had been spent with Winnipeg as a background, and now that I looked back I seemed to see nothing but smiling faces, hear nothing but friendly voices, and recollect a thousand kindly actions!

CHAPTER XV

§ I

EARLY on the fourth morning of our departure from Winnipeg, the cattle-train rumbled over a bridge across the broad St. Lawrence with its multitudinous wooded islands, and pulled up in a stockyard on the outskirts of Montreal.

I felt tired, hungry, and seedy, when Slim, a young hobo, and myself, boarded a street-car. From the streets of poverty-stricken foreign-looking tenements we passed through, Montreal impressed me as being a sprawling, dirty, sordid city.

We called on the shipping-agent after breakfast in a squalid dockside café. Slim's passage to Liverpool was assured. My heart thumped down into my boots when the agent said brusquely that he could do nothing for me. Here was a fine situation! Four dollars in my pocket and stranded in this tough-looking city!

Bidding Slim farewell, I went off with the young hobo.

One chance remained yet of getting on board the cattle-boat! A life-long friend of my parents had secured an important position in the city some years before. Perhaps he had influence in shipping circles!

Going into the nearest telephone box I looked up the directory. When I 'phoned up Mrs. MacNain and asked for her husband's office address she was amazed that I should be in Montreal. 'We thought you were doing so well in the West,' she cried. 'Your name has been flourishing in the local papers in the Old Country as a great pianist.'

When she invited me out to her house, I said I would call when I had seen Mr. MacNain, and, feeling a little more hopeful, quitted the telephone booth.

The streets of Montreal seemed ludicrously narrow after Winnipeg. For the first time I saw one-way traffic. There

were hordes of down-and-outs mingling with the hurrying business folk. When I stopped a pedestrian to ask the way to my friend's office, they either thrust me aside or walked on with a shake of the head. It occurred to me that they took me for a beggar in the old clothes I had worn on the cattle-train, so I confined my inquiries to policemen.

§ 11

'Mr. MacNain will be back at any minute,' said the office-boy. He nodded towards a seat in a dark alcove and I sat down to think over my desperate plight.

Simultaneously with the entrance of the man I awaited, the telephone bell rang in his private room. Without seeing me Mr. MacNain bustled through the deserted general office.

'No, I tell you,' I heard him bawl angrily. 'I won't have him out at the house . . . I want nothing to do with these boys . . . I'm not going to have him out at the house, I tell you . . . No! I don't care what you say or what people will think, I tell you I'm having nothing to do with him.'

From the rest of the one-sided talk that was bawled out at the top of his voice, I realized that MacNain was referring to myself.

'Show him in,' he rasped to the office-boy.

Intensely agitated, I found myself facing Mr. MacNain.

'Well, what d'you want?' he rapped out. The way he eyed my shabby clothes reminded me of Roscoe.

Colouring, I explained my situation.

'And what do you want me to do?' he inquired coldly.

'Well,' I stammered, 'I wondered if you had any influence in shipping-circles, and if you would help me to get home on this cattle-boat.'

'What do you want to go back to Scotland for? What do you propose doing when you get there?' he asked grimly.

I held my tongue. To explain to a hard-headed Scot that I intended devoting the rest of my life to the study of music was impossible.

'Where have you come from?' he demanded.

'The West,' I replied.

'You look like it,' he sneered, eyeing me up and down.

'What's the name of the ship?' he asked, picking up the telephone receiver.

'The agent says he can't take another man on board that ship,' said MacNain when he turned to me again. 'What do you intend doing now?'

'I don't know,' I said wearily. 'Try and get a job in Montreal, I suppose. You don't know of anyone I could call on, do you?'

'Ach, this isn't an employment bureau,' snarled the man whom I had seen with the tears running down his cheeks as he tried to make a speech at a farewell party held by my parents before he sailed from Scotland.

'Do you know that your brother is in Montreal?' he called after me as I turned to go.

'My brother in Montreal!' I gasped. 'When did he land? Where is he staying?' I cried eagerly.

'How should I know where he's staying?' snorted MacNain. 'Come back here to-morrow, and I'll see if I can get his address.'

§ III

When the brain-storm I left Mr. MacNain's office with had subsided I found myself in the Place d'Armes. As I stared at the twin ornate towers of Notre Dame church I told myself I had been a fool to expect sympathy from any of my pre-Canadian friends. Whenever my mind reverted to Roscoe and MacNain waves of indignation swept over me, leaving me trembling. Calling on former friends only gave them an opportunity to insult me! Damn them all for a lot of swine!

Nobody knew anything of my brother at the hostel MacNain had said he stayed at when he landed a fortnight before.

In my despair I called on a Presbyterian minister who received me on the doormat, regretted he knew of nowhere

I could go in search of employment, and dismissed me with a few platitudes.

I passed through one narrow lane whose high sinister tenements made me shudder at the thought of being stranded in such a human cesspool. A Chinese woman peering through an iron-barred window set me wondering what the grimy walls hid from the clean sunlight. Poverty in Winnipeg hadn't the slimy repulsiveness of that dark lane with its silent, shuffling population!

In a dock-side street where vast grain elevators overshadowed dingy warehouses, I met the young hobo who had travelled in the cattle-train with us.

'Got any money?' were his first words.

'A dollar or two,' I replied, glad of some one to talk to.

'Come and stand us a drink,' he said, nodding to the dingy saloon across the way.

We entered the saloon, sat down at one of the little round tables and ordered two glasses of beer.

'Gee! but this is a tough town,' began Bud. 'I guess I'll beat it up north to the gold-fields . . . This town ain't good for no man.'

'Going prospecting?'

'Nope, but there's work to be had in the new mines, I hear them say.'

Telling Bud the news about my brother, I said as I ordered two more glasses of beer, 'If I don't find him to-morrow I'll beat it north with you.'

'Sure boy,' nodded Bud sagely. 'We'll make it out together. Don't you git worryin' about things; that's how you git old. I never worry; I've found it doesn't pay . . . When I don't like a place or a man I just move on . . . It saves a lot of trouble.'

While the young hobo philosophized, I looked about me. Unshaven haggard-faced men in rags moved slowly past the open doors — some who had been fortunate enough to beg a few cents sat despondently at near-by tables — futility, hopelessness, despair, and death, was written over them all. God! What was happening to our civilization, that men were being reduced to this state everywhere? Terror seized me

when I reflected that if I didn't find work soon I would find myself flung on the human scrap-heap myself.

'Gee, I wasn't ten minutes in that street there,' said Bud, 'when a young dame, good looking too, came up an' asked me if I'd like to earn ten dollars.'

'Ten dollars! What did she want you to do for ten dollars?'

'Say, that's nothin', boy,' cried Bud when I expressed horror at the sexual perversity he described. 'This town's rotten through an' through . . . The prisons are full, so are the hospitals, and look at the streets . . .' He swept his arm towards the silent down-and-outs and shrugged his shoulders.

'Canada! . . . The Land of Hope!' I breathed.

'Sure, boy, you've said it,' said the sophisticated Bud, whose calm unsmiling air was that of one who has seen, so much of what human nature is capable of, that he has ceased to be surprised at anything.

We wandered along the river front. A man stopped us in the shadow of an enormous grain elevator.

'Why, if it isn't Bud!' he exclaimed, wringing my companion's hand delightedly. 'Fancy meetin' you again . . . Say, it's years since I've seen you . . . Gee! it certainly is a small world.'

'Oh, I guess the world is big enough,' replied Bud gravely. 'It's just that fellows like you an' me keep travellin' round in circles. It isn't strange that we should meet in Montreal . . . It would be stranger if we didn't meet sometime.'

'But you don't look a day older than when we were out in France together! How d'you keep so young, Bud?'

'Oh, I guess because I never worry about anythin' . . . We're not like those business men who worry all the time about makin' money, an' then, when they've made it, worry about how they're gonna keep it. If I get somethin' to eat now an' then, an' then a drink or two with a friend, that's all I ask for; an' so I keep young.'

In a land where the air was thick with news and rumours of sensational murders, robberies, and all sorts of unsavoury things, the conversation which followed, full of references to mutual acquaintances with weird nicknames, set me glancing

round apprehensively for policemen. After all, what did I know about Bud? He might be wanted for murder in half a dozen States!

Arranging to meet Bud in the evening, I left them in a saloon and set out to explore the city.

§ I V

Buying some peaches for a few cents from a stall, I began wandering aimlessly. The number of churches I saw astonished me. From scraps of French caught from the passers-by, the bi-lingual posters and public notices, and the antiquity of some of the buildings, I might have been back in Europe. Now and then I stopped and gazed with admiration at a fine building — a cathedral, college, office-building, railroad depot, or hotel. Passing through sordid warehouse and slum areas into crowded shopping centres and wealthy suburban districts, I realized that Montreal, like all other cities, had its show places and streets breathing of financial security and moral integrity, as well as its sinister alleys and dockside squalor.

Footsore and hungry, I rejoined Bud in the evening.

While we were having a meal in a frowsy café a band of savage-looking Harvesters burst in and sat down noisily in a corner. I studied them with interest. Their speech had become a wild medley of Clydeside argot and American slang. Canada, in some inexplicable way, had stamped itself on their faces. Their laughter had become harsh and mirthless. They made me think of the French Revolution and the Communistic upheaval in Russia; of streets running with blood and skies lurid with the glare of burning buildings. They were the kind of men who would screech with demonic laughter as they murdered, raped, and brought the frail structure of our civilization to the ground!

'Are ye lookin' for some place tae sleep, boys?' inquired two newcomers who engaged us in conversation. 'Come along wi' us if ye are.' Lowering his voice and nodding meaningly

across the room, one of them said, 'Ye've got tae watch yersel' in this toon . . . They fellows there wid cut yer throat as soon as look at ye. Ye micht go intae a hoose for a night's lodging an' never wake up again . . . There's gangs in Montreal that wid murder their ain mithers for a nickel.'

We accompanied the two Scots to their lodging house. I crept wearily into a single bed, while Bud got into one of the two double beds our room contained. In the middle of the night a hand shook me out of a heavy sleep. 'Come on, Jock, hae a drink,' said a stranger, bending over me and thrusting a whisky bottle under my nose. Cursing loudly to himself, a companion as drunk as himself was attempting to climb into the vacant double bed. I sleepily refused the drink and knew no more till Bud woke me in the morning.

In a more friendly mood, Mr. MacNain told me my brother was living at Verdun, and gave me the address.

Bud and I set off in search of the suburb. We passed the Bonaventure railroad depot, crossed the Lachine canal, and leaving docks and mean paper-littered streets behind, came to a long row of solidly built houses facing the river. The street, tree-planted on the riverside, seemed endless. We passed a camping ground where motor tourists, their cars gaily decked with coloured pennants bearing the names of the cities they had visited, moved among white tents. Street-cars clattered past at intervals. At length I found the number I sought. A two-story apartment block at the beginning of a street of shops.

§ v

Mounting a flight of steep narrow stairs I knocked at the first door I saw. It was opened by a fat untidy woman. Taking one look at me, she turned and shouted excitedly:

'Hey, Davie, here's yer brither.'

There was a confused sound of voices, scraping of chairs, and hurrying footsteps within. I found myself shaking my brother by the hand in the midst of a voluble crowd of Scots of both sexes.

'I've been hunting all over Montreal for you,' said my brother David. 'Ever since MacNain 'phoned up my boss last night and said you wanted my address.'

'Aye,' corroborated the stout woman. 'He wis aboot aff his heid and had the boys runnin' aboot a' ower the place till a' hours o' the mornin' lookin' for ye.'

'Had you any money? . . . Where did you sleep the night? . . . I couldn't get any information out of MacNain at all,' said my brother anxiously. 'The swine said he didn't know whether you had money or where you were going.'

I told them of my ill-luck with the cattle-boat and then of Bud in the street below and our plans to seek work in the new gold-mines.

'Ye're gaun tae nae gold-mines,' cried Mrs. Macowsen, the stout female. 'We've had enough bother tryin' tae find ye. Ye'll stey here, an' we'll see whit can be done aboot gettin' ye a job.'

I went down to Bud, and giving him my last two dollars, said I was staying in Verdun.

'Sure, I understand,' said Bud, pocketing the money. 'You'll be better with your brother, I guess, than beatin' it on freights with me . . . Well, so-long, kid, an' good luck.'

§ V I

For the first few days I did nothing but study my new environment. The Macowsens hailed from Clydebank. There was the father, grey haired, tall, genial, and unemployed. His wife was a shrewd, outspoken, warm-hearted soul. The eldest daughter was married to one Bardowie, a baker's vanman. There was Gracie, an enormously fat daughter of thirty; Tam, a weedy youth with a receding chin, and eighteen-year-old Mary, who worked in a laundry and shared her bedroom with a workmate.

From the window of the big room my brother and I shared with Tam, one commanded, over the flat roofs across the street, a view of the wooded bulk of Mount Royal, round

which flowed the grey mass of the city overhung by a pall of smoke and dust.

'Couldn't he get a job through his Lodge?' I asked Mrs. Macowsen, when she talked of her husband's connection with Freemasonry one day.

'He'll no' dae that,' she replied, shaking her head. 'For a' that's he sae high up in the Craft he'll no' use the Masons tae better himsel' . . . He always says the Masons shouldnae be used for that purpose.'

At meal times Bardowie protested loudly that he 'was the only man in the family at work', and he was 'damned if he was gaun tae keep the whole bloody family'.

Gracie related at least once a day how she had refused an offer of seventy-five dollars a week to enter one of Montreal's Red Lamps.

Tam lived a secretive listless life of his own.

When my brother, who was working three days a week, built a powerful wireless set, he was hailed as a genius by the entire household. While dance music blared from the Mount Royal Hotel through the loud-speaker, they stood staring by the hour, repeating in awe-struck tones, 'My, is it no' wonderfu'.'

Wondering what the effect of this latest marvel of science would be on the musical profession, I regarded the loud-speaker with the hostile eyes of a nineteenth-century hand-loom weaver on a power-loom.

Undecided about my next move, I read cheap paper-covered detective and Wild West yarns as an antidote to my mental misery, and wandered about the streets and into the country.

§ V I I

As the Macowsens had no piano and it was weeks since I had touched an instrument, I jumped at the opportunity when a Mr. and Mrs. Smith came to see the Macowsens and said to me, 'Come an' gie us a tune on the pianna. It hasnae been played on for ages an' it'll dae it guid.'

I called at their flat next afternoon with a copy of Mendelssohn's 'Rondo Capriccioso' and Liszt's 'Rigoletto Paraphrase'. When I sat down at the piano I discovered that my technique had vanished utterly. I listened with horror to the sounds my stiff awkward fingers produced as they stumbled about the keyboard and stopped, feeling cold and sick.

'Ach, ye're playin' fine,' cried the small, thin, voluble Mrs. Smith. 'Wi' a bit o' practice ye would be as guid as ony o' them.'

Over a dish of tea she said, 'John's got a holiday the morn an' we're gaun intae Montreal tae the picters an' want you tae come wi' us . . . Don't say a word tae onybody or young Tam Macowsen'll be wantin' tae ken why he wasnae asked tae.'

Mr. Smith called with news for me a few days later.

'I've got a friend a foreman in a rollin'-mill,' he said. 'They're openin' up the auld mill for a rush order an' I was puttin' in a guid word for ye. Ye're tae go along an' see my friend if ye want a job. "Tell him it's rough work," he said.'

I declared joyfully that I would go to the mills next day.

'Haw! haw!' scoffed Tan. 'He's gaun tae work in the rollin' mill.'

'What's wrong with that?' I asked in surprise.

'Ye'll find oot soon enough,' cackled Tam.

'You shut yer mouth,' snapped his mother. 'Sittin' there laughin' at folk! . . . It wid dae ye a lot mair guid if ye went doon wi' him an' got a job yersel.'

§ VIII

When I took a street-car into Montreal the following day I hadn't the vaguest idea what a rolling-mill was.

I discovered myself gazing into the vast cavernous interior of an ironworks. The noise when I entered the gloomy building was deafening; long angled strips of metal clanged and

clashed as they were loaded on to motor trucks and railroad flat-cars; massive machines did things to white hot metal, and in the lurid glare, grimy overalled men moved like weird underworld shades.

Mr. Smith's friend proved to be a giant, with great broad shoulders, long hairy arms, and a voice which rose above all the clamour. He looked like Mephistopheles in a Canadian hell. Beside him, the Poles and Lithuanians were pigmies.

'Sure,' he roared, when I explained my mission. 'You can begin work to-morrow . . . We're openin' up the mill across the road for a rush job . . . Come along an' see me at half-past seven . . . And see here, sonny, stick it if you can . . . It's hell's own work, but don't lose heart, stick it out.'

I felt like dancing all the way back to Verdun.

§ 1 x

Next morning I waited among a cosmopolitan crowd outside the timekeeper's office. A friendly little Pole engaged me in conversation till the door was opened.

I 'punched-in' on the time-keeping machine and followed the others into the mill — a vast barn-like place with a sandy floor and stacks of angle-bars and heaps of scrap metal everywhere. The monstrous rolling machines were situated at one end of the building with a moving platform running from them towards the other end.

When work commenced at the machines the hideous rattling, clanging, and whirring, bewildered me. As a means of protecting our hands, we were handed small rectangular strips of leather with a slit at one end. 'Now remember to stick it out, sonny,' said the giant foreman in passing.

Armed with iron tongs about four feet long, another man and I mounted a bed of steel rails and began pulling the angle bars off the moving platform as they came along from the rolling machines. Pooh! it was child's play, I told myself after ten minutes.

The bars, twenty feet long, were red hot when they left the machines and dull red by the time they reached us. As the morning wore on the rails beneath my feet grew hot; sweat poured from me, and I became parched with thirst; the ceaseless clanging of metal on metal dulled my brain, while the sun beating on the iron roof above turned the building into an oven. Ere a halt was called at midday the heat of the steel rails was causing us to hop from foot to foot.

From where I sat as I ate the sandwiches Mrs. Macowsen had parcelled for me, I could see the tramp steamers in the docks.

Our next job was to pass the angle bars through sets of grooved rollers to remove the kinks. The bars were heavy and seemed to grow heavier as the afternoon drew towards evening. My nerves became frayed by the din.

Sometimes, when carrying the straightened bars across the wide sandy floor, I found a big tireless negro at the other end of the one I helped to lift. The first time we reached the place where the bars were being piled I yelled a warning 'Drop', and let my end fall. As the negro took no notice of my warning shout and held on to his end, the long angle bar kicked up like a live thing and sent him staggering. The negro glared at me and uttered a low curse.

'Why didn't you drop it when I shouted?' I cried.

I worked on mechanically, thinking that railroading was child's play to this.

A flat car was loaded with bars and wheeled down into a corner of the building which was littered with scrap iron. While we were stacking them on top of the scrap I again found the negro at the other end of my bar. When I brought my end into line with the bars lying on the ground I shouted 'All right?' and then cried 'Drop'. The negro stared at me and watched me drop my end while retaining his own. He was almost knocked off his feet.

'Are you crazy?' I shouted.

'Yo want to land in hospital?' said the negro in a dangerous tone. In a half-crouching attitude he moved towards me, a murderous look in his eyes. He stopped when I picked up a

two-foot bar of iron from the scrap under my feet and said 'Come on.' He must have seen in my eyes that I intended to crack his skull if he tried to lay his hands on me, for he moved away muttering to himself.

For the rest of that terrible day we avoided one another. When we stopped work it was dark. I moved in a great aching haze, barely able to drag one foot after another.

§ x

After wild dreams of murderous negroes with open razors in their hands, I was wakened by my brother crying that it was time to rise if I was going back to work.

When I tried to rise every muscle in my body shrieked out in protest. I groaned and lay down again.

'Naw, I don't think he should go back tae the mill, it's been too much for him,' said Mrs. Macowsen when the entire household came in to see me.

I rose at midday and hobbled into the kitchen like an old man crippled with rheumatism.

§ x i

August slipped into September. The nights were hot and clammy, and spectacular electric storms played with lurid magnificence above Mount Royal. I slept badly and longed for the cool salt winds of home.

I grew listless and wandered unhappily about the streets trying to formulate some plan of life. The riverside was gay at nights; the youth of the suburb danced on open-air floors, bathed, and paddled canoes about the many tree-clad islands dotting the noble St. Lawrence.

The spectacle made me feel sad and lonely. Those young people of my own age were happy because they were at home

in their own country, surrounded by people they had known since childhood! I was a stranger without hope in a foreign land!

I grew desperate while I watched Montreal at work and play. One precious day after another was slipping past that might have been spent at the piano regaining my lost technique!

George, the fiancé of the Macowsen's girl-lodger, came in one day. The Prairie Provinces were crying out for harvesters. He was going West with some friends and Jessie and he were going to get married when he returned.

Harvest time already! God! I couldn't face another winter like the last!

When George tried to persuade me to join his party I shuddered and said, 'I've had all the harvesting I want.'

'Ach, it's his mither the laddie wants hame tae,' cried Mrs. Macowsen. 'Wid ye like us tae get up a subscription and get ye a passage back in a cattle-boat?' she asked me.

Smiling sadly, I spoke of my former failure to secure a passage.

'Ach, it was money the agent wanted,' cried Tam. 'If ye had offered him ten dollars he would soon have got ye a boat . . . When onybody aboot here feels hame-sick they just go doon wi' ten dollars in their haun an' say that they want a trip back tae the Auld Country. I ken them that's been hame three times in the one year. Ten dollars is the regular chaarge tae get a job on a cattle-boat. By gee, I wish I was a shippin' agent . . . Chairgin' ten dollars an' stickin' the wages the men should get for workin' their passage intae his ain pocket . . . It's no' half a peyin' game.'

'But supposing,' I said, with hope rising within me, 'I did manage to get on a ship and found that there was no hope of getting anything to do in Scotland, could I get back to Montreal again?'

'Of coorse,' they chorused. 'Part o' the agreement is tae bring ye back tae the port ye sailed frae.'

'Leave it tae us,' declared Mrs. Macowsen. 'We'll hae a

whip-roon an' raise the ten dollars . . . Don't you fret, son, we'll see ye a' right.'

A few days later I went to see the shipping agent again. When I waved ten dollar bills in his face he found no trouble in signing me on a cattle-boat, due to sail from St. John, New Brunswick, at the end of the week. He shook his head at the appeals of a pinched-looking Englishman at my back.

CHAPTER XVI

§ I

WHEN I entered the passenger coach at the rear of the cattle-train I found a score of men volubly storing away their belongings. Heaving my suitcase and kitbag into a corner I sat down and studied my fellow cattlemen. They were a friendly lot, with the exception of a lanky individual who adopted a hectoring tone, and ordered everybody about until a young Irishman cried, 'B'jeeze, if ye don't shut yer trap I'll smash yer bloody jaw.' As the rest growled their approval, Lanky relapsed into silence for a time.

The foreman, a hard-faced man in shirt sleeves and battered felt hat, came in and rasped out our names from the list in his hand. 'Now, is everybody here?' he snarled, glaring round.

Lanky followed him when he quitted the coach. When he returned and was accused of trying to curry favour and get a soft job on the boat, Lanky blustered and showed fight till his accuser squared up to him.

I had so little love for Montreal, that, when we began our five-hundred mile journey to St. John, I never as much as glanced out of the coach window.

'Whaur hae I met ye before?' said a squat little Scot, planting himself before me and staring into my face in a puzzled way. 'My, I ken yer face fine . . . But I cannae place ye.'

It was the little fellow on the *Marburn* who had been so keen on playing chess with me.

'Why, of coorse, I mind ye now,' he beamed, when I told him of this. 'Man, but I'm real pleased tae see ye again . . . Here, I'll bring ma things up beside ye.'

'And what do you think of Canada now?' I asked, when he was settled in the opposite corner.

'Canada!' His face clouded. 'It's a helluva country . . . Goad! I wouldnae like tae think that I had tae spend the rest o' ma days oot here. I'd droon masel' first . . . Once I get hame tae Glasca' I'm gaun tae take damn guid care I never leave it again.'

While the train jogged eastwards Shorty recapitulated his experiences of the past year.

'I'll never forget sleepin' wan night in an auld shack in Fort William,' he said. 'I was oot o' work at the time and had nae money, an' this empty shack was the only place I could find tae sleep . . . There was nae furniture in the place, ye ken; nae beds — juist the bare boards . . . It was in the spring, an' my, but it was cauld at nights . . . So here I was, sleepin' in this deserted shack, juist ma coat flung over me, an' nae food . . . Between hunger an' cauld ye can picture what I felt like. Weel, did I no' dream that I was landin' in Glesca, an' gaun up the stairs an' knocking at the door o' ma ain hoose! . . . My wife opens the door an' threw her arms roon my neck cryin' "Oh, Jock," an' the twa bairns began jumpin' up an' doon shoutin' "Oh, daddy, daddy," that pleased tae see me again . . . Then I wakened up, tae find the tears runnin' doon ma cheeks, an' that I was juist aboot frozen tae death. D'ye ken, I felt that lonely an' miserable that I cried like a bairn.'

'Aye, I've wandered aboot an' seen a lot since we were on the *Marburn*,' he concluded. 'But, ach, I would rather be on the dole at hame than live like a dog among they Bohunks in the Bush. I've been a' roon Hamilton, London, an' Niagara Falls, but I could never make enough money or get a steady enough job tae be able tae send for the wife an' wains. Ye've nae idea the thoosands o' men in a' they places that are juist desperate tae get back tae the Auld Country.'

'What did you think of Niagara Falls?' I asked.

'Ach, nothin' at a' . . . Ye hear a lot o' blethers aboot it, but I can see nae beauty in a hale lot o' water fallin' over a cliff like thon. It's a great sight but it's no' beautiful . . . Goad's truth, I widnae gie Loch Lomond for the hale o' Canada . . . This isnae a bonnie country like oor ain.'

The rest of the cattlemen were striking up friendships and

the atmosphere of the coach became thick with anecdotes, reminiscences, and tobacco smoke. During prolonged halts at little farm towns we sauntered down the Main Streets, and those with food and money shared with those who were destitute.

§ 11

Entering the State of Maine, the pastoral scenes on either side of the track, rendered vivid by the gold of ripened grain, gave place to a wilderness of undulating broken country, diversified by innumerable lakes. The conifers were the tallest and finest I had yet seen. Deserted shanty towns and lumber camps at wide intervals gave the country a desolate abandoned look. I stared out of the window and brooded on the fate of Homo Sapiens. My Spenglerian speculations became mingled with threads of memory, thoughts of the voyage before me, and what the future held for the men chatting or dozing around me.

In a blaze of glory the sun went down on the uninhabited wilderness of rock, lake, river, and forest. I was mystified by a strange emotion. It was then that I realized I had grown to love Canada. My eyes grew moist and my heart heavy. This, lying outstretched before me bathed in sunset hues, was a spacious land! A man might wander all his days and never know it all, while Scotland was so small, so old and sophisticated, so rigid and set in all its ways! I shivered as if an icy wind had blown through the coach.

Darkness crept over the desolate landscape.

One by one the cattlemen fell asleep, leaving me to my vigil at the window.

The train rattled slowly along; the wheels clicked a monotonous little rhythm. There were no stars spangling the black vault above. When the locomotive laboured up a gradient its panting rang startlingly clear and staccato on the still night air. Now and then the noise of our progress rose in a sudden crescendo as we plunged into a rock cutting or an avenue through a pine forest.

After a long time I became aware of a subtle change in the pitch blackness I stared out into, and presently, to reward my vigil with this last glimpse of the wilderness, a great harvest moon soared up and flooded the world with a ghostly brilliance.

When the moon appeared above the horizon, the train was toiling painfully up a gradient at walking pace, following the contour of a hillside. I caught my breath at the cold hard beauty of the scene. Below me the land sloped down to a loch, lying like a sheet of polished steel and reflecting the rocky hill behind it, the newly-risen moon, and the few sentinel pines on its shores. All the rest was a tumbled sea of naked rock, dotted with the blasted remnants of a forest ravaged by fire. The world seemed to have died long ago, so utterly wild did that region seem in the white moonlight, so devoid of life and movement, so still that the noise of the train only intensified the primeval silence.

I contrasted the savage final curtain America had staged for me, with the warm glow of light, the soft melting of hill, sea, and sky, the opalescent clouds floating above radiant isles, weaving poetry and romance out of the last trembling rays of the setting sun, which had been my last glimpse of the Hebrides a year previously.

The train wound into a deep rock cutting and I fell asleep, for the next thing I knew, it was dawn, and I was cold and stiff, and everybody else was yawning, grumbling about the cold, and wondering when and where the next meal was coming from.

§ 111

I had hardly rubbed the sleep from my eyes when the train stopped.

'Come on, get out an' see to them steers! . . . D'you guys think you're gonna sleep here all day?' stormed the foreman.

'Hey, when do we get our breakfast?' cried a voice.

'Breakfast be b——, ye'll get it on the ship when the cattle are on board, an' that's when,' bellowed the foreman, brutally.

Muttering mutinously we quitted the coach.

The steers, with a piece of metal clipped to one ear to show that they had been passed by the veterinary surgeon, were driven in single file along a narrow passageway through a shed leading from the stockyard to the quay. Short lengths of rope were fastened round the horns of each animal, then they were driven up gangways to the decks of the large tramp steamer, whose upper works I had glimpsed when the train stopped.

The familiar sight of gulls wheeling and screaming above ruffled grey water, and the grey lowering sky overhead, made me feel that home was near at hand.

§ I V

The bunks ran round the steel walls of the fo'c'sle in two tiers with a block of eight in the centre of the floor. When we rushed in, after goading the last steer on board the ship, I threw my suitcase and kitbag on a lower bunk in the middle and claimed it for my own.

Our messroom was a long narrow slit on the starboard side of the sleeping quarters.

A cheer went up when Shorty, and a perky little carpenter who had been nicknamed Austrylia, brought our breakfast from the galley.

'Whit hae ye brought us, boys?' shouted someone.

'Fish,' piped Austrylia in his shrill voice.

A plate containing a fish about a foot long was handed to me. My share of the few small loaves allotted to twenty men was two slices. There was margarine and the scrapings of a pail of jam. The tea had a bitter flavour.

The way the fish bit my tongue made me wonder if the cook had used a great quantity of pepper in cooking it.

'Eugh! . . . Christ! this bloody fish is stinkin',' cried the man opposite me, throwing down his knife and fork and pitching the contents of his plate through the open port behind him.

'Look at this bleedin' tea,' wailed Austrylia, peering into the tin pitcher he had brought from the galley. 'It's made with green leaves.'

Amid a chorus of groans and curses the food was thrown into the harbour, and those who could afford it went ashore in search of an eating-house.

§ v

The tethering of seven hundred and fifty steers in the stalls built round the upper and lower decks proved a long, arduous and exciting task, but at length it was done.

Gathering us under the bridge, the foreman explained our duties, punctuating his sentences with lurid oaths and threats. With a six-foot ex-engineer from the Clyde and a stout greying ex-butler from the south of England, I was detailed off to feed and water the cattle on the upper deck aft.

The job took little more than an hour. Bales of pressed hay were stacked six feet high in every sheltered inch of the deck; we cut the wires of several bales, shook the hay out, and carried it in armfuls to the stalls. When the animals had eaten, we dipped pails into barrels which were kept filled with water from a hosepipe and saw that each animal drank till it was satisfied.

Afterwards we went for'ard, and, sitting among the bales of hay piled on the top of the hold, discussed the execrable breakfast we had been given.

'Look! There's a balloon goin' up,' a man cried, pointing to the town lying across the harbour.

I ran for my camera and tried to get a picture of the pilot making a parachute descent while the gasbag went up in flames.

'It's only a stunt,' one of the men who had been ashore explained. 'They're havin' an exhibition in St. John just now. They're expectin' those three American guys that's been flyin' round the world, to pass over the harbour this afternoon.'

Later in the day three dots appeared in the air, coming over the Bay of Fundy from the north. We cheered and waved to the gallant pilots as the seaplanes roared overhead on the last lap of their world flight.

§ V I

At nightfall we crept away from the Railway Wharf at Sand Point. I went up on to the fo'c'sle top with Shorty and three others. Breaking up a cake Mrs. Smith had given me before leaving Verdun, I shared it round and handed a chunk to the look-out in the bow.

We were seated comfortably on a coil of rope, the harbour lights slipping past, the look-out singing into the darkness, and the wind thrumming in the wires, when a voice on the bridge bawled through a megaphone: 'Ahoy there! . . . Clear off that deck you cattlemen.'

Swearing loudly we returned to the fo'c'sle where everybody was complaining indignantly about the three uneatable meals we had been served with during the day.

Lying down on the straw mattress on my bunk and pulling the grey dubious looking blankets over me, I felt a little queer. I could still feel the taste of that fish I had eaten in the morning. I lay looking up at the rivetted plates and iron beams above and saw a huge rat steal along above the top tier of bunks running round the walls. Ugh! this last episode was becoming horrible and disgusting! Thank God it couldn't last more than a fortnight!

The ex-butler came up to me and asked me if I would like to change bunks with him.

'I can't sleep in a top bunk,' I replied. It was above his bunk that the rat had appeared.

'God, this boat's alive with rats,' a voice cried in disgust.

I groaned inwardly. The straw-filled pillow under my head aroused my suspicions, but I was afraid to examine it too closely lest it reveal a crawling horror.

§ V I I

My strange surroundings and the fear of rats, lice, and of being poisoned by the fish I had eaten, kept me awake most of the night. I was roused from a fitful sleep by the foreman

storming in and shouting, 'Come on now, you —s, show a leg an' get them cattle fed an' watered.'

I crawled out of my bunk feeling ill. It was cold on deck. The wind was wet and the sky greying. We stumbled sleepily about our duties. There seemed no quenching the thirst the animals had acquired from the salt air, but at last we were finished and free to return to the fo'c'sle in the growing daylight.

I tried to eat my breakfast, but like the others, with the exception of Austrylia and Lanky, threw it out of the porthole in disgust.

'This is hellish, we cannae go on like this,' cried Shorty to me in great indignation.

I smiled wanly, too sick and miserable to speak. After eating a little bread and drinking a mugful of the bitter green tea, I went out into the fresh air and crawled like a sick dog into a warm corner among the bales of hay. The sun came out and the sea remained comparatively calm.

The last land we saw was Sable Island, a lonely barren mass of red rock, where, one cattleman said, many ships had been wrecked and crews lost.

Our sole duties being the tending of the cattle we had most of the day to ourselves, and, like the travellers in the leisurely fiction of pre-Industrial Revolution times, everyone told their tales of travel, hardship, and disillusionment.

With the exception of two Frenchmen who kept themselves aloof, but displayed a friendliness towards me to the extent of begging me to visit them in Paris, the cattlemen were proletarian English, Scots, and Irish.

At midday, a watery soup, in which floated a few fragments of vegetable, was followed by leathery meat and little green potatoes. If there was a third course I never saw it.

'We can't eat this stuff . . . God's truth, we haven't had a meal we could eat since we came on board the ship,' cried a young Northumbrian miner vehemently, as I hurried from the messroom to be violently sick.

§ VIII

In the night we struck a bad patch of weather and I suffered internal agony from sea-sickness on an empty stomach.

'What the hell's this man lyin' here for?' roared the foreman next morning. 'Come on, get out.'

'The boy's sick,' cried one of the two night-watchmen indignantly as the foreman shook me roughly.

'Sick be ———, he'll get up an' do his work,' bellowed the foreman.

I staggered along to the after-deck. Ten more days of this! I would never see Glasgow alive!

The ex-butler and engineer were at work, grumbling about having to tend a whole deckload of cattle themselves.

'Are you sick, boy?' asked the ex-butler not unkindly. I nodded as I dipped a pail into a water barrel and began watering the steers. I had scarcely strength to carry a pail to the stalls only a few feet away.

The gale blew us homewards. The seas racing after us were so big that when the ship, a ten-thousand-ton tramp, sank into the trough of a wave the crest could be seen above the level of the bow.

That day was like a nightmare, so was the next, and the next. To my infinite wonder I still lived, though unable to eat anything save a little bread that Shorty forced on me in great concern every meal time. I was compelled to drink cold water as the green tea acted as a strong purgative.

In a twilight of consciousness I stumbled about my duties, carrying hay, slopping water over myself, and being drenched by the spray that swept over the stern.

One day the magnificent spectacle of a full-rigged ship on our starboard side made me forget my misery for an hour. When night crept over the wild waste of racing seas the sailing ship was still visible far astern.

Another day, the sight of a great tramp being smothered in heavy seas as it beat its way westward, roused me from my semi-stupor.

Four days out saw us on the point of mutinying.

'We'll a' be deid before we reach Glesca' if we don't get a decent meal,' cried Shorty passionately. 'Wha's comin' wi' me tae lay oor grievances before the captain. We cannae go on like this, throwing the grub intae the sea a' the time, instead o' puttin' it in oor guts.'

The fo'c'sle was filled with an excited babble of voices. Curses were heaped on the steward, the shipowners, and the train of misfortune which had landed everybody in such a miserable situation.

I joined the deputation which marched up to the bridge.

'Well, what do you fellows want up here?' demanded the officer on duty.

'We want tae see the captain,' said Shorty truculently.

'You can't see him,' replied the officer curtly.

'Why can we no'?' asked Shorty fiercely.

'He's sick.'

'See here,' cried Shorty, all his Scots' independence of spirit surging up. 'We're a' stairvin' . . . We havenae had a meal fit tae eat since we came aboard this bloody ship! . . . Look at they potatoes . . . Look at that tea . . . Try an' eat that stinkin' meat.'

Shorty thrust a plate and mug under the officer's nose.

We were assured that the captain would be informed of the state of affairs in the fo'c'sle and that something would be done about it.

'It had better,' cried Shorty bitterly. 'The rest o' the crew livin' on chicken an' the fat o' the land, an' feedin' us wi' muck that a pig wid turn up its nose at. By Goad! wait till we get back tae oor ain country an' let the authorities ken the wey you Yanks run your boats. Christ! the cattle are better fed than we are.'

I expected that we would be clapped in irons after Shorty's outburst, but the officer merely ordered us back to the fo'c'sle.

That night we had an extra ration of bread sent up with a pail of jam.

§ x

Though woefully weak through lack of food, my spirits recovered as the sea went down. A desperate looking crew with our growing beards, we sat on our bunks at nights singing camp-fire songs or listening to the ex-soldiers fighting the Great War again. The magnitude of the theme inspired them to such heights of story-telling that one was gripped and held spellbound. They talked like men in a trance. As one began when another left off, a modern Iliad might have been written in the course of one evening.

When the rumour went round that land would be sighted next day, everybody shaved and talked excitedly of what they intended doing when they got on shore.

My two companions on the after-deck discussed ways and means of getting to London where they had hopes of picking up jobs.

'I've got a married sister in Glasgow,' said the ex-engineer, as we watered the cattle that night. 'We can get some food from her to begin with.'

'We can tramp the roads,' said the ex-butler eagerly. 'With luck we'll get lifts from motorists . . . If it comes to a pinch we can beg our way; I don't care, I know how to go about it.'

Hearing those two middle-aged men talking about sleeping in barns and doss-houses, and yet so optimistic about getting work, saddened me. The world was full of such men. And when I thought of my own fate, everything seemed grey, gloomy and tragic.

§ x i

When the cattlemen sighted the Irish coast on the morning of our tenth day at sea they cheered and danced with joy, pounded each other on the back and shook hands with glee.

It was a grey blustery day, with low sagging rain clouds labouring over a leaden sea, hiding the mountain-tops and the sun. When we rounded the Mull of Cantyre it was a stark, black, dismal Scotland that frowned on my return. After the brilliant sunshine of the prairie, the gloom of the land which had glowed so brightly in my memory dismayed me.

'Come on you cattlemen,' bellowed the foreman as we stood in a cluster on the deck looking at familiar hills again, 'we've got to get all that hay up on deck.'

The next two hours were spent in hoisting bales of hay out of the forward hold.

An altercation arose when the foreman said we were forbidden to leave the ship until we unloaded the hay on the quayside at Merklands Wharf.

'Naw, by Goad! shouted Shorty. 'We'll dae nae such thing; unloadin' the hay is the stevedore's job.'

'Ye'll obey captain's orders or you'll be clapped in irons,' snarled the foreman.

'Oh, will we obey orders?' retorted Shorty fiercely. 'Then clap us in irons and be damned.'

A growl of assent went up from the rest of us.

Bawling curses, the foreman went up to the bridge. 'The captain 'll have you arrested for mutiny and handed over to the police when we dock if you don't obey orders.'

'Arrest us, then,' howled Shorty. 'That's juist what we want. Take un intae a British Court by Goad, an' it'll gie us the chance we're juist lookin' for tae show up the whole bloody lot o' ye . . . I ken fine ye're feart tae bring us intae Court.'

After another visit to the bridge the foreman told us cursingly that we could leave the ship whenever she docked.

§ X I I

'What a helluva looking country,' exclaimed one of the Northumbrian miners as he gazed on what was visible of the granite peaks of Arran, black as ink in the gloomy light.

A tiny paddle-boat, looking as if it had escaped from a

glass case in a museum devoted to early means of transport, thudded alongside as we entered the narrows between the islands of Bute and the Little Cumbrae. An American deck-hand guffawed as he gazed down on it.

'Gee! what is it, anyway?' he asked me derisively.

In the crowded fo'c'sle everybody, when I went in to change into my one decent suit, was exchanging vows of eternal friendship. The ship was well into the Clyde when I regained the deck.

A passenger train rattled along the hillside close to the ship. I gazed with astonishment at the diminutive locomotive and toy coaches as they whirled out of sight. My wonder grew as we bore steadily up the narrowing river. Was this muddy ditch the Clyde? Was this Lilliputian country with its pocket handkerchief fields and gently swelling hills the Scotland I had bragged so much about during the past year?

My disappointment vanished when I saw the evidences of industry in the miles of shipyards. What after all were Winnipeg and Montreal but glorified market towns? Here men made enduring things! No, the Old Country was far from being dead!

When I remembered my desperate circumstances, the fog and gloom enwrapping the Second City of the Empire, and the miles of grimy warehouses and depressing tenements, struck a chill at my heart. How did I know I would be welcomed home again? Would I be forced to sail back to Boston on this ship and face another Canadian winter?

When we docked I went up to the chartroom. The captain had two shipping clerks with him.

'Hullo, Walker!' cried one, an old High School form-mate. 'What are you doing on board this ship?'

'I've been looking after your cattle for you, David,' I laughed.

'Have you been on board this ship?' the captain said in amazement, when I asked him about my passage back to America.

'Why, yes, I came on board at St. John,' I smiled.

Before replying, the captain looked me up and down with

a puzzled expression on his face. 'We sail in a fortnight's time from Liverpool if you want to return,' he said at last.

A shave and change of clothing had evidently changed me from an unkempt, haggard-looking hobo, to an entirely new being in the captain's eyes!

§ XIII

I trembled like a leaf as I carried my belongings down the gangway. It was unbelievable that I was really back in Glasgow!

Passing through the dock gates I entered a lamplit street and made for Dumbarton Road. Funny how new and strange everything looked! The shops, the clothes, the bright double-decked trams!

An aunt who lived not far away was astounded to see me standing on her doorstep.

'Things are dreadful in Glasgow,' she said, over the meal she gave me. 'The country is in a terrible state . . . Millions unemployed, and nobody knows what's going to happen next.'

Canada was little better, I said.

'Do you think there will be a revolution?' she asked. It was no idle question, I knew, for this was the breeding ground of the Clydeside Reds who at that moment were howling the doctrines of Karl Marx in the House of Commons.

'I don't know,' I said slowly, thinking of the glimpses I had seen of the rising river of hatred which was swirling round the pillars of the social structure raised by Capital and Individualism. 'When a man is deprived of the right to work, and finds starvation staring him in the face, he doesn't care much what happens to him . . . He'll smash blindly at anything . . . I don't know whether there will be a revolution or not, but I do know that the world can't go on like this indefinitely without something terrible happening.'

§ XIV

An hour later I sat in a third-class compartment of a train which hurtled towards the Ayrshire coast at what seemed a tremendous speed after Canadian railroads.

Though physically limp after the voyage, my mind raced feverishly on. Stations flashed past the carriage window, and, before I quite realized where I was, I found myself standing on an empty platform with a cool wet sea-wind in my face.

Only a little walk and I would be home again? I looked up at the dark cloudy sky before moving towards the barrier.

Like a colossal tidal wave the twentieth century was sweeping traditions and old habits and forms of life and thought before it, creating a chaos out of which my generation would be forced to build a new order of things or perish, as the Greeks and Romans had perished! I had sailed away in sunshine, with the sound of cheering in my ears; in darkness I had crept back alone, with sadness in my heart, and little hope, but with a great determination to find some niche for myself in this mad modern world.

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